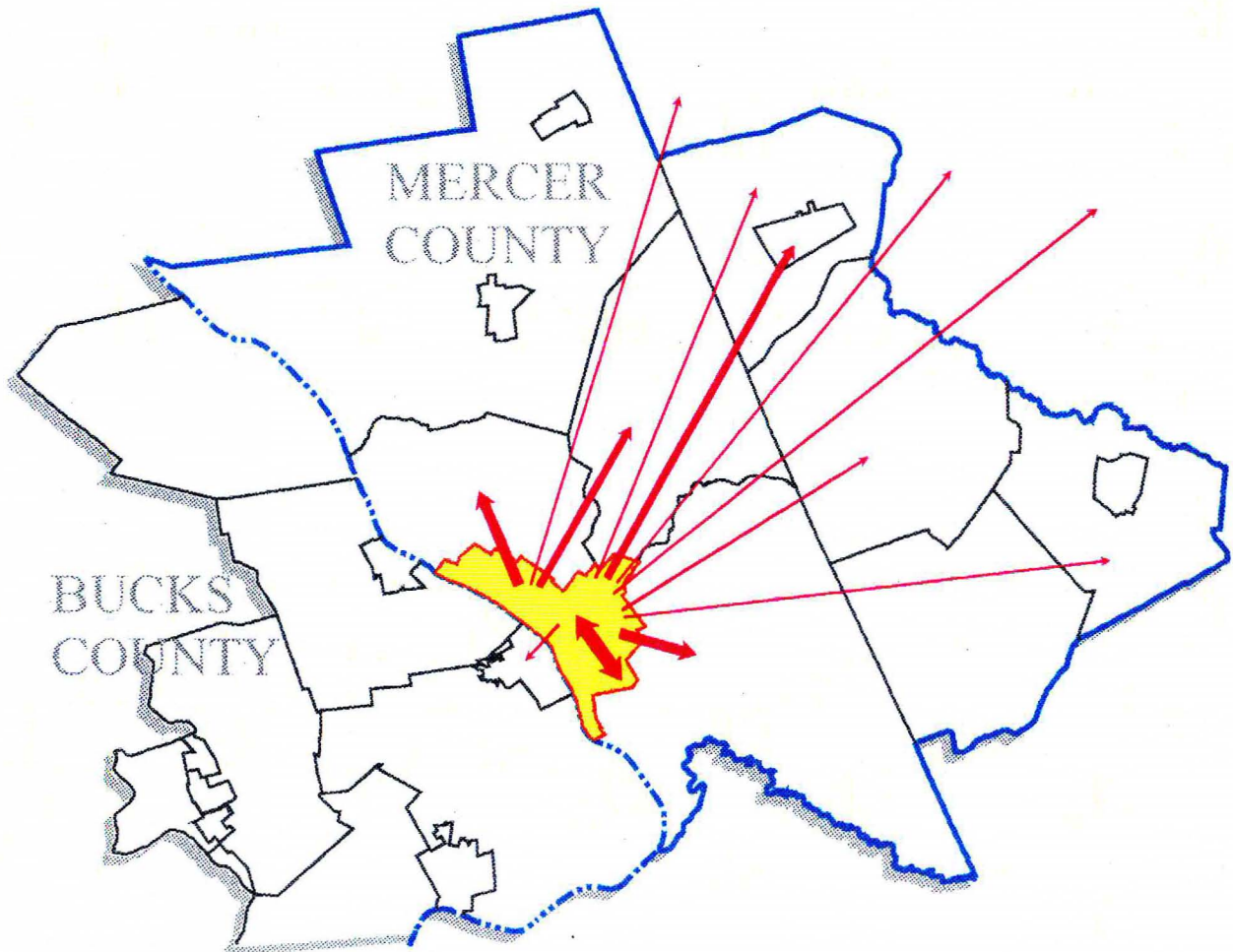


TRENTON AREA REVERSE COMMUTE OPTIONS



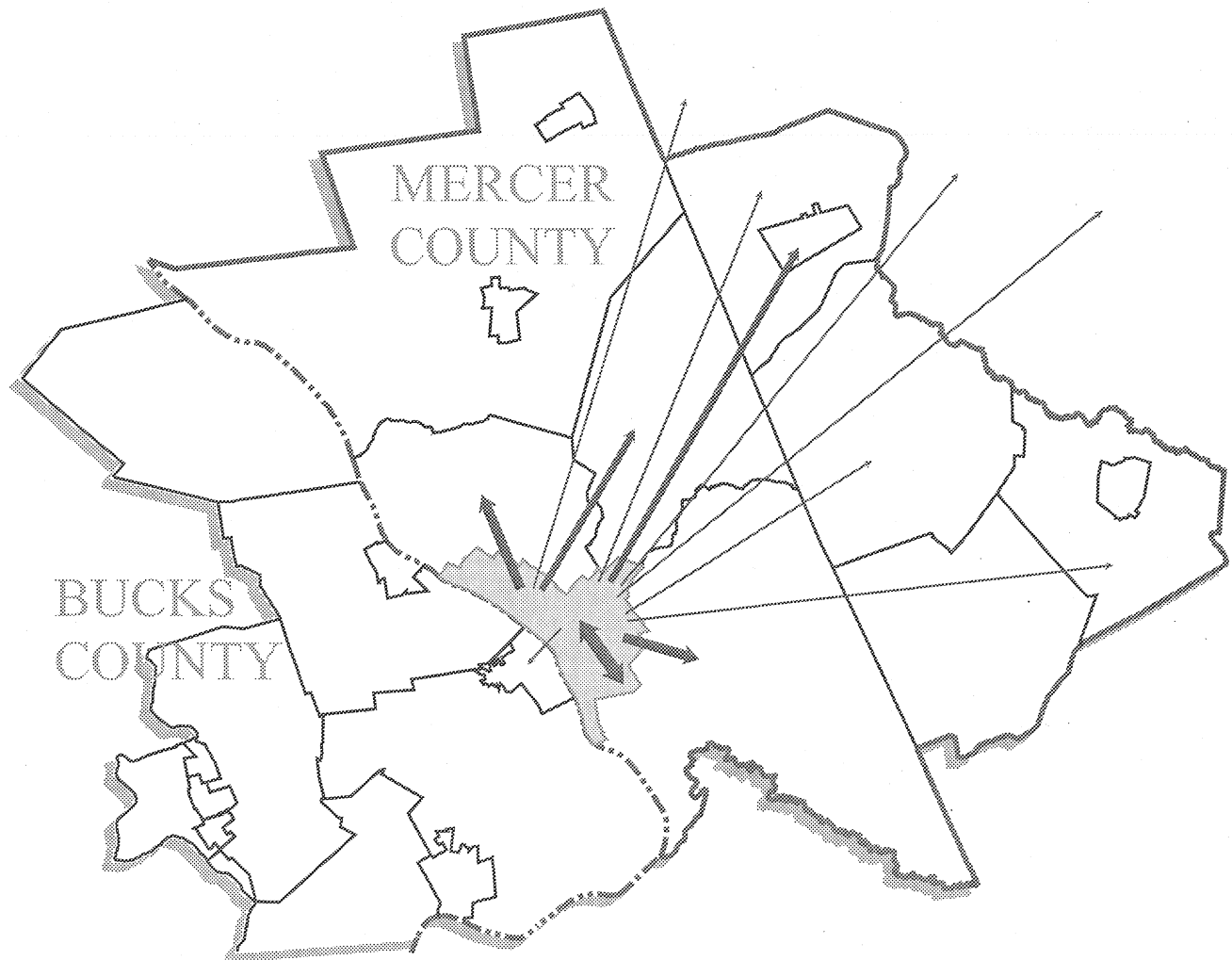
PREPARED FOR THE
CITY OF TRENTON
DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND DEVELOPMENT



PREPARED BY THE
DELAWARE VALLEY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

MARCH 1997

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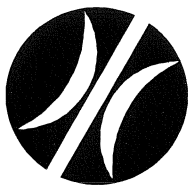


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MARCH 1997

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Created in 1965, the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) is an interstate, intercounty and intercity agency which provides continuing, comprehensive and coordinated planning for the orderly growth and development of the Delaware Valley region. The region includes Bucks, Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery counties as well as the City of Philadelphia in Pennsylvania and Burlington, Camden, Gloucester, and Mercer counties in New Jersey. The Commission is an advisory agency which divides its planning and service functions between the Office of the Executive Director, the Office of Public Affairs, and three line Divisions: Transportation Planning, Regional Planning, and Administration. DVRPC's mission for the 1990s is to emphasize technical assistance and services and to conduct high priority studies for member state and local governments, while determining and meeting the needs of the private sector.



The DVRPC logo is adapted from the official seal of the Commission and is designed as a stylized image of the Delaware Valley. The outer ring symbolizes the region as a whole while the diagonal bar signifies the Delaware River flowing through it. The two adjoining crescents represent the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the State of New Jersey. The logo combines these elements to depict the areas served by DVRPC.

DELAWARE VALLEY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

Publication Abstract

TITLE	Date Published: March 1997
TRENTON AREA REVERSE COMMUTE OPTIONS	Publication No. 97001

Geographic Area Covered: City of Trenton and the surrounding metropolitan area

Key Words: reverse commute, journey-to-work, regional labor market, employment centers, job decentralization

ABSTRACT

Job decentralization and lack of access to private automobiles limit the ability of many Trenton residents to travel to jobs in expanding suburban employment centers. This study analyzes commuting patterns for Trenton resident workers, assesses transportation and labor market conditions from the perspective of employers and job placement professionals and identifies a range of reverse commute strategies and recommendations.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The term “reverse commute” refers to the trip of a city resident to a job located outside of the city limits. Interest in reverse commuting grew during the high growth/low unemployment economic climate of the late 1980s as a strategy to address suburban labor shortages. Reverse commuting also has been viewed as a response to the geographic mismatch between relatively low-skilled central city residents and entry-level jobs located in the suburbs. Currently, reverse commute initiatives are being explored as a way to support the transition from welfare-to-work and as a way to increase transit ridership by improving service to expanding markets. At the request of the City of Trenton, the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) has undertaken a reverse commute study to consider these and other issues affecting the regional transportation network and labor market. The primary objectives of this study are to analyze commuting patterns from Trenton, assess transportation and labor market conditions from the perspectives of employers and job placement professionals, and develop strategies to strengthen connections between Trenton and expanding suburban employment centers.

Recent jobs data and DVRPC’s long-term employment forecast for Mercer County suggest that large numbers of Trenton residents must commute to jobs outside of the city to gain access to the most promising economic opportunities. This trend is problematic in that a significant share of Trenton residents do not own or have access to a car. The 1990 Census reports that 30 percent of Trenton households do not have a car and 40 percent have a single car. While one car may be sufficient for a family with a single wage earner, it may restrict the employment options of two-income households. In an era when jobs continue to move out of central cities and most people commute by car, Trenton residents with limited access to automobiles may have difficulty fully participating in the labor market.

DVRPC identified twelve employment centers in Mercer and Bucks Counties that represent the most significant concentrations of jobs in the regional economy, collectively accounting for over 267,000 jobs in 1990. While Central Trenton remains the single largest concentration of jobs in the region, the distribution of centers is further evidence of continuing job decentralization. To test the accessibility of these centers using the public transportation network, DVRPC studied available commutes and fares to ten sample employers. Seven out of ten destinations could be reached from Central Trenton by transit during peak hours, which indicates that much of the transportation infrastructure to support reverse commuting is already in place. However, a number of employers and job placement professionals characterized the level of service available to second and third shift workers as inadequate. This suggests one way that the existing transit network can be improved to better accommodate reverse commute travel patterns.

To gauge employer priorities, DVRPC sent surveys to more than 400 large employers in Mercer, Bucks, Middlesex, Somerset, and Burlington Counties. The survey addressed a range of issues including existing and expected job vacancies, employer willingness to encourage alternatives to driving alone, and the mismatch between job requirements and job applicants. The fundamental conclusion of the survey is that, with some notable exceptions, area employers are not currently experiencing a significant labor shortage. Even among major suburban employers, the number of reported openings for un- and low-skilled workers is limited. Few employers expressed a willingness to sponsor new transit programs to improve access to the Trenton labor

pool, probably because employers who are already able to attract and retain qualified workers see little reason to underwrite potentially expensive new transportation initiatives.

DVRPC's interviews with job trainers and placement professionals yielded a substantially different view of the regional labor market. In contrast to employers' relative success filling job openings, job placement professionals described a much more difficult job climate for Trenton residents seeking work. New entrants to the labor force face stiff competition, particularly for low or unskilled positions. Tight labor market conditions are compounded by the effects of downsizing and increased use of temporary workers. In addition, a number of labor market professionals testified that Trenton residents who lack access to private automobiles frequently face significant transportation barriers to job placement and retention.

While the survey showed that new reverse commute initiatives are not employers' highest priority, job trainers and placement personnel made a convincing case that steps must be taken to improve the mobility of the Trenton workforce. In addition, welfare reform and mandated-work requirements create a new and compelling reason for improving access to suburban job centers for public assistance recipients. Well-designed reverse commute initiatives can help Trenton's low-income population enter the workforce in significant numbers. As the regional and state economies continue to expand, the resulting improved reverse commuting opportunities for Trenton residents will yield benefits to workers and businesses alike by increasing employment opportunities and enhancing the labor pool.

At the same time, reverse commuting should not be oversold. Despite significant job growth in the suburbs, barriers such as skill deficits, long commuting distances, day care issues and low wage rates will prove insurmountable to some Trenton residents. For others, expanded travel options will translate into better jobs and higher income. The end result will depend, to a large extent, on how well the program is tailored to match the needs of suburban employers with the skills offered by the Trenton workforce. This study concludes with nine recommendations that individually or collectively could form the basis for a Trenton reverse commute strategy.

- ▶ Create a Roundtable for Transportation and Job Placement Professionals
- ▶ Improve Interjurisdictional Coordination
- ▶ Expand the Use of TransitCheks
- ▶ Promote Employer-Operated Van Service
- ▶ Expand Employee-Operated Van Service
- ▶ Create a TMA-Operated Start-Up Van Service
- ▶ Modify Ridesharing and Guaranteed Ride Home Programs
- ▶ Facilitate the Process for NJ Transit Route Modifications
- ▶ Use Welfare Restructuring as an Opportunity

Although there are few sources of money earmarked for reverse commute initiatives, recent evidence suggests that well-conceived projects can attract funding from transportation and non-transportation sources, including funds designed to facilitate the transition from welfare-to-work.

I. INTRODUCTION

The well being of Trenton residents, workers and employers depends to a greater extent than ever before on economic events that occur outside of the city limits. Increasing numbers of Trenton residents hold jobs elsewhere in Mercer County, in other parts of the state and outside of New Jersey. Workers must be willing and able to commute to new and sometimes distant job centers in order to take advantage of the best available opportunities. Rather than recruit resumes from any single neighborhood or municipality, employers hire from a highly competitive regional labor market where education and experience are a prerequisite for the vast majority of positions. This competition has been intensified by corporate downsizing and retrenchment which has caused many workers to vie for jobs that otherwise might have gone to less experienced workers.

In the context of continuing job decentralization, economic competitiveness requires that Trenton residents can reasonably access new jobs in suburban employment centers and that employers in Mercer County and other parts of the region can fill available job vacancies without undue difficulty. By definition, a traditional commute refers to the journey-to-work trip of a suburban resident to a job in the city. Conversely, the term “reverse commute” refers to the trip of a city resident to a job located outside of the city limits. Reverse commuting has gained attention over the past few years for several reasons. First, when labor markets are tight, creating new access for city residents to suburban jobs can address labor shortages and improve the economic environment for employers. This concept was of interest during the high growth/low unemployment climate that characterized much of New Jersey in the late 1980s. Second, reverse commute initiatives can help respond to the geographic mismatch between relatively low-skilled central city residents and entry-level jobs located in more distant suburbs. Finally, reverse commuting is now being studied as a way to facilitate the transition from welfare-to-work and as a way to increase transit ridership by improving service to expanding markets.

At the request of the City of Trenton Department of Housing and Development, the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) has undertaken a reverse commute study to consider these issues. The primary objectives of this study are to analyze commuting patterns from Trenton, assess transportation and labor market conditions from the perspective of employers and job placement professionals, and develop strategies for establishing links to connect Trenton residents to jobs in growing suburban employment centers. The study process was assisted greatly by its Steering Committee:

Sheila Albert and Trudy McCray, *Mercer County Private Industry Council*

Sandy Brillhart, *Greater Mercer Transportation Management Association*

Andrew Carten, *Trenton Division of Planning*

Hank Fien and John Mizin, *New Jersey Department of Labor*

Jim Hughes and Alan Maiman, *NJ Transit*

Steven Ponella, *City of Trenton Division of Economic Opportunity*

Salem Reiner, *City of Trenton Division of Economic Development*

Barry Seymour, *Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission*

Virgen Velez and Frank D’Enrico, *Mercer County JTPA*

Pippa Woods, *New Jersey Department of Transportation*

The Steering Committee possessed broad knowledge about existing transportation and labor conditions, and was instrumental in framing the study design, refining the employers' survey instrument, and developing recommendations for further action. The first step in the study process was to define and quantify key demographic and employment variables.

Demographic and Employment Trends

Table 1 summarizes Trenton's demographic and employment trends for the 1970 to 1990 period. The City of Trenton has experienced the same loss of population, jobs and households that has characterized the nation's older, industrial cities in the second half of the twentieth century. From 104,638 persons and 33,530 households in 1970, Trenton's population declined to 88,675 persons and 30,673 households by 1990. Following a sharp (20 percent) contraction of resident workers¹ during the 1970s, the number of employed Trenton residents recovered with a ten percent increase to 36,500 during the more expansionary 1980s. However, even this increase trailed the rate of employment growth in Mercer County and New Jersey as a whole.

While the economy improved for both the city and the surrounding region during the 1980s, Trenton and the rest of Mercer County were traveling along strikingly different paths. As Table 2 illustrates, the total number of jobs in the City of Trenton declined by 5.9 percent during the 1980s while jobs in Mercer County grew by 24.3 percent during the decade.² While the

Table 1
City of Trenton Demographic and Employment Trends, 1970-1990

	1970	1980	1990	Percent Change	
				1970-80	1980-90
Population	104,638	92,124	88,675	-12.0	-3.7
Households	33,530	32,455	30,673	-3.2	-5.5
Resident Workers	41,520	33,211	36,560	-20.0	10.1
Employment	64,728	61,896	58,227	-4.4	-5.9

Source: Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, *Journey-to-Work Trends in Camden, Trenton, Chester and Philadelphia, 1970-1990*, March 1994.

¹Data on resident workers refers to the total number of Trenton residents who are employed, regardless of where the jobs are located.

²Data on job growth refers to changes in where jobs are located over time. This "at-place employment" data measures where employed persons *work* as opposed to resident workers data which shows where employed persons *live*.

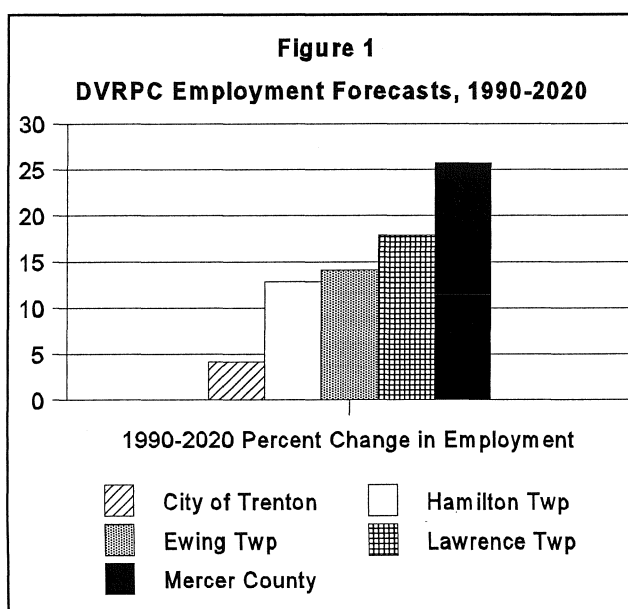
Table 2
Job Growth in the City of Trenton and the Rest of Mercer County, 1980-1990

	1980	1990	Percent Change
Mercer County - Total	180,116	223,948	+24.3
City of Trenton	61,896	58,227	-5.9%
Rest of Mercer County	118,220	165,721	+40.2%

Source: 1990 Census Transportation Planning Package (with adjustments by DVRPC).

differential between the city and county totals is significant in and of itself, the gap between Trenton and the rest of Mercer County is even more striking. The number of jobs in Mercer County outside of Trenton rose by more than 40 percent. The bottom line is that the total number of jobs in the City of Trenton has been declining over the last decade while employment in the remainder of Mercer County has been expanding rapidly.

Regional employment forecasts provide another perspective on labor market trends. As part of its DIRECTION 2020 planning process, DVRPC completed municipal and county-level employment forecasts for the years 2000, 2010 and 2020. These long-term employment forecasts indicate that while some improvement in the city is on the horizon, the job market in Trenton will continue to lag behind opportunities available in other parts of the county. Figure 1 summarizes the outlook for job growth during the 30 year period ending in the year 2020 in Trenton, Mercer County and three municipalities -- Ewing, Hamilton and Lawrence Township -- that generate large numbers of jobs for Trenton residents. The number of jobs in the City of Trenton is expected to recover slightly over the forecast period, expanding by about four percent. In contrast, growth from the county as a whole is expected to be much stronger, rising by just over 25 percent. The employment outlook in Ewing, Hamilton and Lawrence Townships ranges from



13 to 18 percent growth. While in percentage terms these rates are lower than the county average, the double-digit growth is significant in that all three municipalities represent established employment centers that generate relatively large numbers of jobs.

From a policy perspective, these jobs data -- both the recent history provided by the Census data and DVRPC's long-term forecast for Mercer County and its municipalities -- suggest that absent a dramatic turnaround in Trenton, city residents will increasingly have to travel outside of the city limits to gain access to the most promising job opportunities. The trend toward job decentralization shows no sign of slowing,

much less reversing itself. In order to fully participate in Mercer County's projected economic expansion, Trenton residents must be able to access job centers outside the City of Trenton.

The next two sections of this report assess the regional labor market and transportation network. Subsequent chapters review evidence collected from a survey of major employers in the region and synthesizes the results of interviews with job placement and other employment professionals about labor market and reverse commute issues. The study concludes with recommendations and a discussion of funding issues.

II. REGIONAL LABOR MARKET OVERVIEW

Work Travel Patterns of Trenton Residents

Table 3 presents a snapshot of where Trenton residents were employed and their means of transportation to their workplaces based on 1990 Census data. Approximately half (49.4%) of this population held jobs in the City of Trenton, with Hamilton Township (10.9%), Ewing Township (9.5%), Lawrence Township (7.4%) and Princeton Borough (4.3%) the top four most important Mercer County destinations for employment. Overall, 87 percent of Trenton resident workers work in Mercer County, which suggests that measures that improve accessibility within the county have the potential to benefit a relatively large share of the Trenton work force. An additional 8 percent of the Trenton workforce are employed elsewhere in New Jersey. Important job centers outside of New Jersey include Bucks County, Philadelphia and New York City. Map 1 illustrates the major commuting patterns for Trenton workers.

Table 3 also reports the primary travel modes of Trenton residents to job sites in key municipalities and counties. With the exception of travel by public transit to New York City and Camden County, driving alone to work is the predominant method of commuting for all remaining destinations. Approximately 62 percent of Trenton workers drive alone to work, followed by car and vanpooling (18.9%), public transit services (10.1%), walking (7.5%), other means of transportation such as motorcycles, taxicabs and ferryboats (1.5 %) and biking (less than 1%). When these aggregate totals are adjusted to remove Trenton workers employed in the City of Trenton proper, the dependence on single passenger automobile is even higher. Of those employed outside of Trenton, over 67 percent drove alone to work. This greater reliance on automobiles was offset by fewer persons using bicycles, walking or using other means of transportation while the share of Trenton residents commuting to jobs outside the City by means of car or vanpools (18.4%) or transit (11.4%) was largely unchanged.

Even within Trenton, 56 percent of workers drove alone to work, 19 percent used carpools or vanpools, 14 percent walked and less than 9 percent used transit. The most significant users of transit are those Trenton residents who worked elsewhere in Mercer County, including significant numbers who traveled to Lawrence, Ewing and Hamilton townships, each with over 10 percent transit use. The highest absolute number of transit users are Trenton resident workers. The highest percentage users of transit are Trenton residents traveling to New York City, where 73 percent of a very small number of total workers use transit.

While the heavy reliance on single passenger automobiles is consistent with regional and national trends, it limits opportunities for households with restricted access to automobiles. The 1990 Census reports that Trenton's 30,673 total households include 9,134 zero-car (30%) and 12,144 (40%) one-car households. While one car may provide sufficient options for a family with a single wage earner, a single auto may restrict the employment options of two income households where both workers must travel to a different job site. Because a significant proportion of the existing and potential workforce has limited or no access to private automobiles, strategies that seek to improve access for low-income Trenton residents to suburban job sites must focus on non-auto alternatives to be successful.

Table 3
1990 Census Journey to Work Travel Patterns - Workers Residing in Trenton

Place of Employment	Number of Workers	Share of Workers	Means of Transportation - Number						Means of Transportation - Share					
			Drove Alone	Carpool Vanpool	Transit [1]	Bike	Walk	Other [2]	Drove Alone	Carpool Vanpool	Transit	Bike	Walk	Other
Trenton	17,844	49.4%	9,953	3,460	1,566	79	2,478	308	55.8%	19.4%	8.8%	0.4%	13.9%	1.7%
Hamilton Twp	3,934	10.9%	2,698	684	359	0	126	67	68.6%	17.4%	9.1%	0.0%	3.2%	1.7%
Ewing Twp	3,433	9.5%	2,363	563	395	28	59	25	68.8%	16.4%	11.5%	0.8%	1.7%	0.7%
Lawrence Twp	2,678	7.4%	1,713	396	509	13	6	41	64.0%	14.8%	19.0%	0.5%	0.2%	1.5%
Princeton Borough	1,564	4.3%	1,029	416	102	0	0	17	65.8%	26.6%	6.5%	0.0%	0.0%	1.1%
West Windsor Twp	451	1.2%	324	35	70	9	13	0	71.8%	7.8%	15.5%	2.0%	2.9%	0.0%
Princeton Twp	363	1.0%	288	45	30	0	0	0	79.3%	12.4%	8.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
South Brunswick Twp	350	1.0%	246	104	0	0	0	0	70.3%	29.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
East Windsor Twp	330	0.9%	233	72	18	0	0	7	70.6%	21.8%	5.5%	0.0%	0.0%	2.1%
Morrisville	248	0.7%	165	75	0	0	0	8	66.5%	30.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	3.2%
New York City	237	0.7%	43	9	174	0	0	11	18.1%	3.8%	73.4%	0.0%	0.0%	4.6%
Montgomery Twp [3]	228	0.6%	144	84	0	0	0	0	63.2%	36.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Total Burlington Cty	548	1.5%	460	74	0	6	0	8	83.9%	13.5%	0.0%	1.1%	0.0%	1.5%
Total Camden Cty	56	0.2%	25	0	31	0	0	0	44.6%	0.0%	55.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Total Gloucester Cty	7	0.0%	7	0	0	0	0	0	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Total Mercer Cty	31,407	86.9%	19,245	5,776	3,110	129	2,682	465	61.3%	18.4%	9.9%	0.4%	8.5%	1.5%
Total Bucks Cty	1,082	3.0%	614	380	56	0	9	23	56.7%	35.1%	5.2%	0.0%	0.8%	2.1%
Total Chester Cty	37	0.1%	14	23	0	0	0	0	37.8%	62.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Total Delaware Cty	29	0.1%	29	0	0	0	0	0	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Total Montgomery Cty	85	0.2%	68	17	0	0	0	0	80.0%	20.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Total Philadelphia Cty	197	0.5%	124	22	47	0	4	0	62.9%	11.2%	23.9%	0.0%	2.0%	0.0%
Regional Total	33,448	92.5%	20,586	6,292	3,244	135	2,695	496	61.5%	18.8%	9.7%	0.4%	8.1%	1.5%
Rest of NJ	2,247	6.2%	1,505	491	180	42	9	20	67.0%	21.9%	8.0%	1.9%	0.4%	0.9%
Rest of PA	108	0.3%	74	27	0	0	0	7	68.5%	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	6.5%
Rest of NY	312	0.9%	73	9	213	0	0	17	23.4%	2.9%	68.3%	0.0%	0.0%	5.4%
Elsewhere	26	0.1%	14	5	7	0	0	0	53.8%	19.2%	26.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Grand Total	36,141	100.0%	22,252	6,824	3,644	177	2,704	540	61.6%	18.9%	10.1%	0.5%	7.5%	1.5%





Table Notes

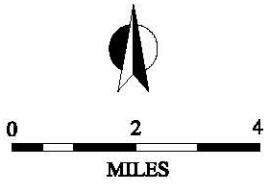
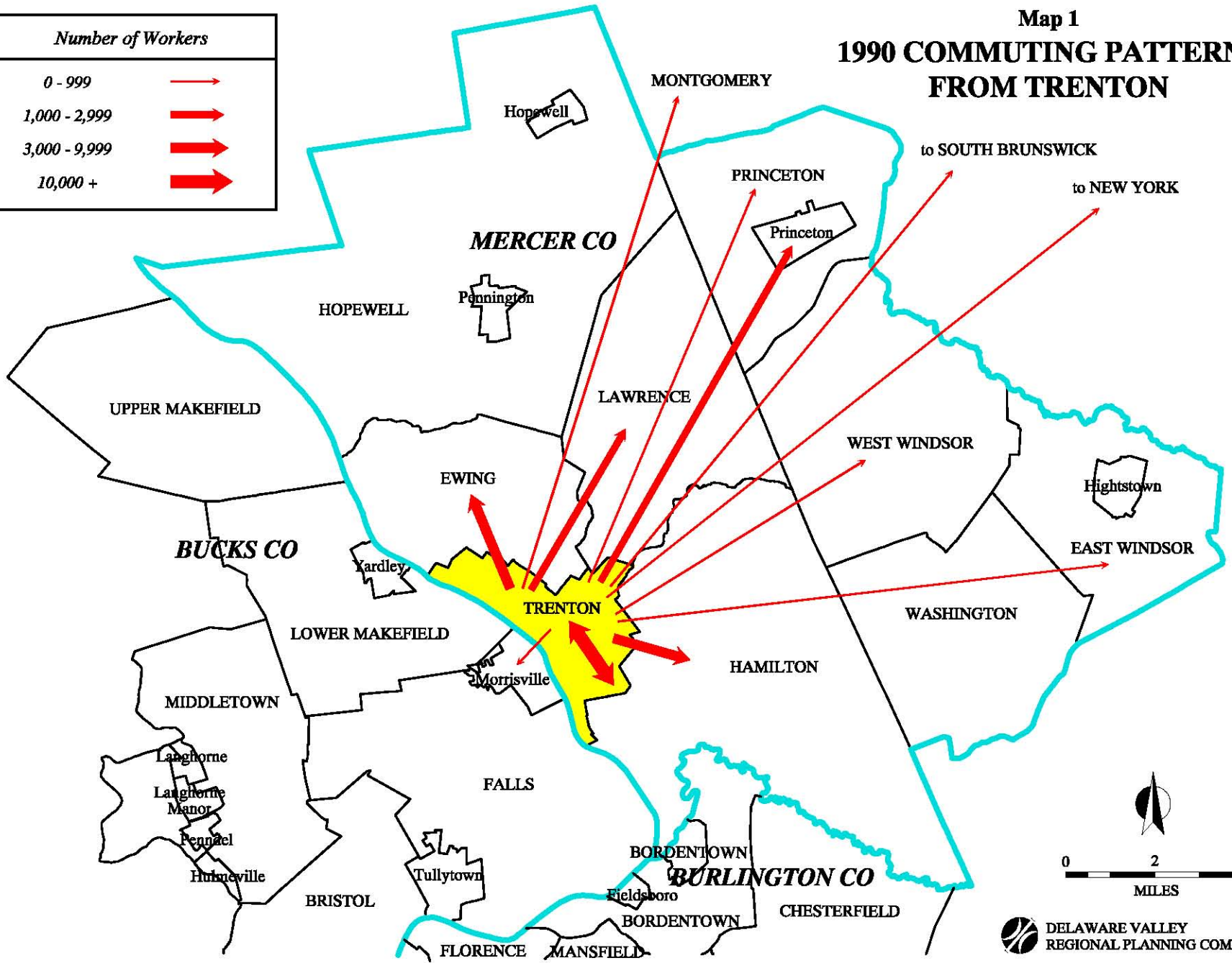
[1] "Transit" includes sum of bus/trolley + subway/elevated + railroad

[2] "Other Means" include ferryboat, taxicab & motorcycle

[3] Montgomery Twp, Somerset County

Map 1 1990 COMMUTING PATTERNS FROM TRENTON

Number of Workers	
0 - 999	
1,000 - 2,999	
3,000 - 9,999	
10,000 +	



Occupational and Educational Profile of Trenton Residents

While a detailed evaluation of the Trenton work force is beyond the scope of this study, two measures can provide insight into the job and skill mix of the Trenton workforce. Table 4 compares the job distribution of Trenton resident workers vis-a-vis their Mercer County counterparts using 1990 Census data. Several comparisons are instructive. First, Trenton resident workers are under-represented in the “executive/administrative/managerial” and “professional” job categories. These two categories represent relatively higher wage jobs and collectively account for more than one-third of the Mercer County workforce versus only 17.7 percent in the City of Trenton.

Trenton residents are also under-represented in “sales” (9.5 vs. 6.7 percent) and to some extent in “technical support” jobs (4.6 versus 3.4 percent). Conversely, a larger share of the Trenton workforce holds jobs as “machine operators and laborers,” 18.6 percent as opposed to 10.3 percent for Mercer County as a whole. Other categories of strength for Trenton include “services” (21.4 vs. 12.4 percent) and, to a lesser extent, “clerical” (22.2 vs. 19.9 percent) and the “precision production, craft and repair” occupations (8.8 vs. 8.0 percent).

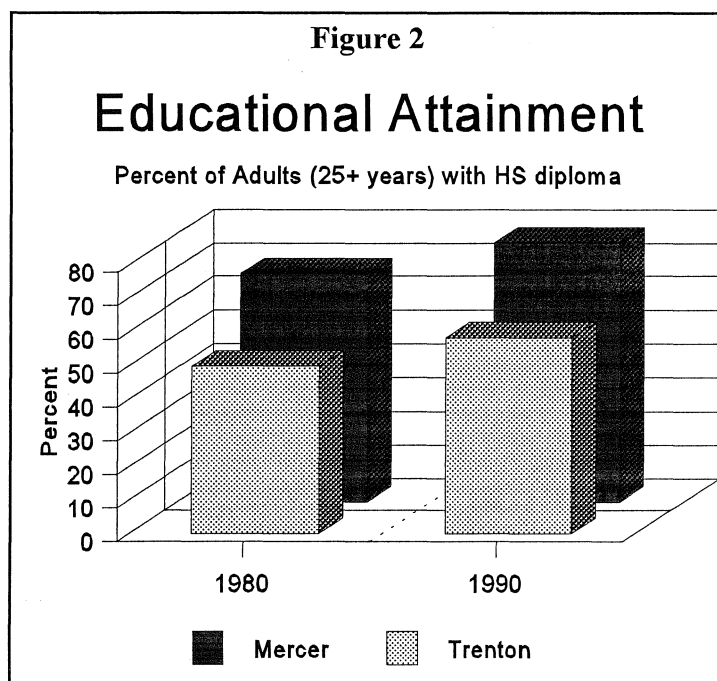
Table 4
Occupational distribution of Trenton Residents vs. Mercer County Jobs (Percent)

	1990 Job Distribution of City of Trenton Resident Workers	1990 Job Distribution of Mercer County Resident Workers
Executive/Administrative/Managerial	8.4%	15.9%
Professional	9.3%	18.3%
Technical Support	3.4%	4.6%
Sales	6.7%	9.5%
Clerical	22.2%	19.9%
Service	21.4%	12.4%
Farming/Forestry/Fishing	1.1%	1.0%
Precision Prod./Craft/Repair	8.8%	8.0%
Machine Op/Laborers/Armed Forces	18.6%	10.3%
Total	100%	100%
Source: 1990 Census, General Social and Economic Characteristics.		

Overall, the Trenton workforce is under represented in occupations dominated by relatively well-paid technical and knowledge-workers and is over represented in lower paying professions that are associated with fewer training and educational requirements. Educational attainment data for Trenton and Mercer County adults provides a partial explanation for the differing occupational profiles. The good news is that the percent of Trenton residents 25 years old and above with a high school diploma rose significantly from just about 50 percent in 1980 to more than 58 percent in 1990. However, the city continued to lag beyond the rest of the county in spite of these gains. The share of Mercer County adults who are high school graduated started at a higher base -- 68 percent in 1980 -- and climbed to more than 77 percent over the decade (see Figure 2). This data suggests Trenton residents have less education and training than their Mercer County counterparts and that this deficit puts them at a disadvantage in the job market.

Two other factors deserve mention. First, Trenton's special status as the capital of New Jersey means that a larger share of Trenton residents will be employed in the public sector than workers from the rest of the county. Whether this constitutes a strength or a weakness in the occupational outlook depends on budget and policy issues at the state and federal level. For example, devolution of major programs from the federal to the state level (e.g., welfare administration) may create more job opportunities for Trenton residents qualified for state employment. On the other hand, pressures to balance the New Jersey state budget work against adding jobs at the state level.

Finally, differences in the occupational and earnings profiles are both a product of and reinforced by the continuing trend of job decentralization. The opportunities available to Trenton residents are, to some degree, shaped by the geography of the job market. To the extent that employers are relocating to more remote suburban destinations, Trenton residents must develop new travel patterns to successfully commute to these new job locations. The next section of this report begins to address this topic by defining the major employment centers in the Greater Trenton Region.



Regional Employment Centers

In 1996, the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission completed an analysis of employment centers in the nine-county DVRPC region that includes Burlington, Camden, Gloucester and Mercer Counties in New Jersey and Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery and Philadelphia Counties in Southeastern Pennsylvania. DVRPC identified and mapped 124 employment centers throughout the region using 1990 Employment Density, Non-Residential Land Use and Business Parks and Shopping Centers data files. Planning staff made preliminary delineations of employment center boundaries which were subsequently reviewed and refined by members of individual county planning departments. For the nine-county region, over 88 percent of all jobs in 1990 were located within the 124-mapped centers. Collectively, they account for nearly 2.4 million of the region's 2.7 million jobs

DVRPC focused on twelve employment centers in Mercer and Bucks Counties as part of the Trenton reverse commute study and the results are shown on Table 5 and Map 2. Ten of the twelve centers are located within Mercer County with the remaining two located across the Delaware River in Lower Bucks County. Table 4 ranks the centers by number of 1990 jobs and reports comparable 1980 job figures and ten-year job growth rates. The three largest centers -- Trenton-Lawrence, Route 1 Business (Bucks County), and Route 1-Penn's Neck -- demonstrate that U.S. Route 1 continues to be the critical jobs corridor in the region.

Smaller, more rapidly growing centers include Bucks County's New Falls Road (which posted a 436 percent increase in jobs over the decade) and Route 31 in the vicinity of Pennington (up by over 150 percent). While these growth rates clearly signal strong new economic activity, their absolute contribution to the regional job market is more modest because they tend to be smaller. Of the twelve employment centers in 1990, New Falls Road and Route 31 rank tenth and eleventh in terms of number of jobs, together accounting for approximately 14,000 jobs. In comparison, Hightstown alone accounts for over 16,000 jobs (up by 39 percent since 1980) while over 18,000 workers travel to jobs on Route 33 (a 36 percent increase over the decade). That these relatively larger employment centers continue to post strong growth rates suggests that they will remain important sources of jobs for Trenton residents and the regional labor force. For the nine centers for which 1980 jobs data is available, the overall number of jobs expanded by slightly more than 20 percent over the decade.³

While there are certainly opportunities for employment in other parts of the region, these twelve centers of economic activity are important to the future of Trenton and its residents. The centers delineated on Map 2 represent the largest geographic concentrations of existing and expected new jobs. In order for Trenton residents to be able to share in these opportunities, they must be able to access them in an efficient and affordable manner.

³ Comparable 1980 and 1990 data for the Route 130, Princeton Pike and Olden Avenue employment centers are not available. Census tracts containing portions of these three centers as defined in 1990 were included in other employment centers in the 1980 analysis.

Table 5
Job Growth in Employment Centers in the Greater Trenton Region, 1990-1980

1990 Rank	ID #	Employment Center	1990 Jobs	1980 Jobs	10-year % Change
1	9.4	Trenton-Lawrence	85,565	69,667	22.8%
2	1.13	Route 1 Business (Bucks Cty)	30,389	29,108	4.4%
3	9.5	Route 1-Penn's Neck	27,440	18,930	45.2%
4	9.3	Airport-Ewing	22,273	23,344	-4.6%
5	9.8	Route 130	21,184	[1]	n/a
6	9.6	Route 33	18,159	13,320	36.3%
7	9.2	Princeton	16,358	21,900	-25.3%
8	9.7	Hightstown	16,256	11,701	38.9%
9	9.10	Princeton Pike	11,765	[1]	n/a
10	1.16	New Falls Road (Bucks Cty)	9,097	1,696	436.4%
11	9.1	Route 31	4,985	1,964	153.8%
12	9.9	Olden Avenue	3,692	[1]	n/a
		Sub-total NJ Centers	227,677	[2]	
		Sub-total PA Centers	39,486	Ten-year	
		Total Regional Centers	267,165	percent change:	20.3%

Table notes:

[1] Comparable 1980 jobs data for Route 130, Princeton Pike and Olden Avenue employment centers are not available. In 1980, census tracts containing these three areas were included in the definition of other employment centers.

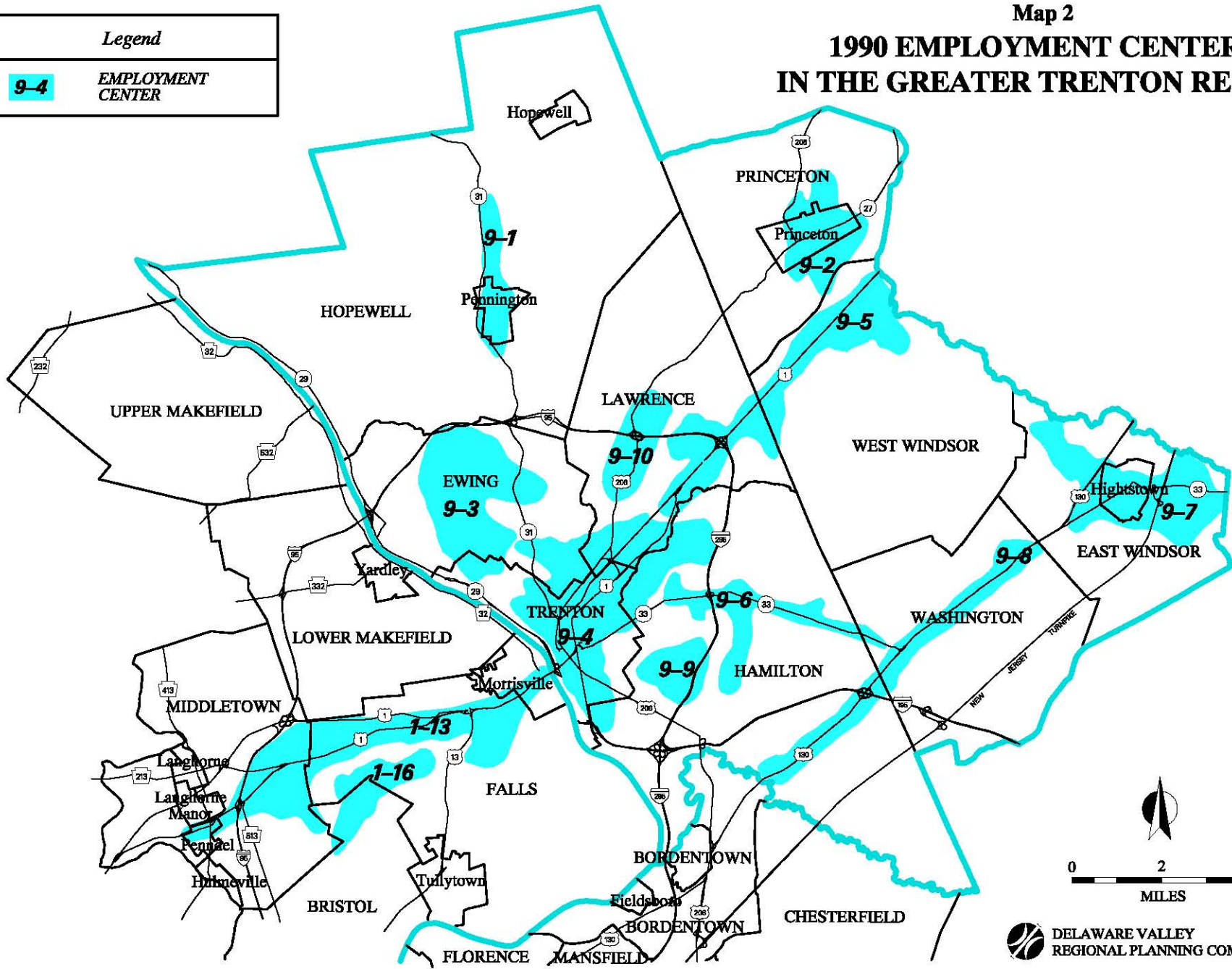
[2] The ten-year growth rate of 20.3% reflects job growth in the nine centers with available 1980 and 1990 jobs data. Does not include job growth in Route 130, Princeton Pike and Olden Avenue.

Source: Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, *1990 Employment Centers in the Delaware Valley*, 1996.

Map 2

1990 EMPLOYMENT CENTERS IN THE GREATER TRENTON REGION

<i>Legend</i>	
9-4	EMPLOYMENT CENTER



As a supplement to its employment centers analysis, DVRPC conducted a series of interviews with job trainers, placement specialists and other employment professionals to obtain another informed perspective regarding important and emerging job centers in the region. Consistent with the employment centers analysis, the Route 1 corridor was the consensus choice as the region's most important job locale. In terms of important emerging centers, Cranbury's relatively new warehouse/distribution center was frequently mentioned as an important growth area. Located five miles east of Princeton Junction in Middlesex County, Cranbury has benefitted from availability of land and superior access to the region's highways. Cranbury's exceptional highway access, however, has not necessarily benefitted Trenton residents who rely on public transportation. Job trainers and placement specialists expressed frustration at their inability to place clients in jobs in Cranbury's rapidly growing distribution centers due to lack of transit availability. Improving access to this area is a top priority.

Several other key job centers that were identified in the interview process include Route 130 (both north and south of Interstate 195), Route 571 (east of Princeton) and the cluster of nurseries off I-95 at Route 524 in the Hightstown area. In the case of the nurseries, one respondent described a substantial, seasonal demand for up to 300 agricultural workers during the March to November period. The same respondent indicated that unsolved transportation and liability issues have directly limited the ability of these employers to hire and retain Trenton residents, including significant numbers of Hispanic workers who have agricultural experience that would be appropriate training for these positions.

Jobs data and jobs developers concur that most new employment opportunities are being created outside of the central city, and that the work travel patterns of Trenton residents are changing as a result. Over 60 percent of Trenton's workforce drive alone to work. These individuals have generally been able to adapt to job decentralization and have been able to access opportunities in relatively distant emerging employment centers by simply changing the route they travel in their single passenger automobile. However, 30 percent of the city's households have no car and another 40 percent have access to only one car. These existing workers (and potential entrants to the labor force) must rely on alternative methods of travel to their jobs, including ridesharing and the public transportation network. The next section briefly describes the major components of the transportation network, and explores the feasibility of some typical commutes from Central Trenton to suburban employment centers.

III. THE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION NETWORK

New Jersey Transit and Other Transit Providers

Trenton is an important transportation hub in Mercer County featuring bus and rail connections to job sites in Pennsylvania, New York and New Jersey. Map 3 illustrates NJ Transit bus and rail routes serving the Greater Trenton Region. Key Mercer County routes in the passenger bus system include:

- 409 Trenton-Willingboro-Philadelphia
- 600 Trenton-Princeton-F Forrestal Village
- 601 Trenton State College-White Horse
- 602 Pennington Trenton
- 603 Mercer Mall-Quaker Bridge Mall-Hamilton
- 604 East Trenton-Trenton Rail Station
- 605 Princeton-Quaker Bridge Mall
- 606 Princeton-Mercerville-Hamilton Square
- 607 Ewing-Trenton-Independence Mall
- 608 Hamilton-West Trenton
- 609 Ewing-Quaker Bridge Mall-Mercer County College
- 611 Trenton-Perry Street Shuttle

In addition to NJ Transit passenger bus service, the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) operates a bus route providing service between Trenton and the Oxford Valley Mall in Bucks County. Suburban Transit/Suburban Trails provides service to New York, via routes originating in Princeton and Hightstown.

Trenton residents also have access to passenger rail service to New York City and other destinations. NJ Transit's Northeast Corridor Line runs from Trenton to New York City with a stop at Princeton Junction. For points south, SEPTA's R7 line provides rail service to Philadelphia from the Trenton and West Trenton Stations. Amtrak also provides intercity rail service to destinations north and south of the Trenton Station.

Alternative Forms of Public Transit

While bus and rail services are the most familiar modes of transit, private carriers represent another transportation option. The range of private carriers include taxicab, jitney, limousine, private van and charter bus services. In addition to purely private-sector service providers (e.g., taxis), public sector funders occasionally team up with private sector providers to provide hybrid forms of transit service. For example, the Princeton Junction Shuttle is a commuter bus service that connects East Windsor, Hightstown, and West Windsor railroads with the Princeton Junction Rail Station during peak hours on weekdays. The Shuttle is funded by federal and state bus grants with local support from the East Windsor Township, the Borough of Hightstown, the East Windsor Regional School District and Mercer County and is operated by a private bus company. The cash fare for this ride is \$1.00 each way which is equal to fare for a one-zone NJ Transit bus trip. Discounted tickets are available for volume users (40 trips for \$32).

The Wheels program, operated by the Lion Corporation under contract to NJ Transit, is another example of an alternative to traditional bus or rail service. Wheels operates as a subscription service which means that passengers call in advance to be included on a run. Routes are somewhat flexible and passengers are generally picked up at or near their homes. Route 976 operates in residential neighborhoods and office parks in Lawrence, Princeton Junction and the Carnegie Center while Route 977 is the Princeton Junction Rail Shuttle to West Windsor. Not supported by dedicated funding, the Wheels program was a three year pilot that began in 1994 and is slated to conclude in the summer of 1997. The fare structure for this service is similar to that for other NJ Transit bus routes. A one-way ride to or from destinations in West Windsor is \$1.00; a one-way ride to or from Ewing or Lawrence is \$1.40. The WHEELS program has been funded by a dedicated federal Congestion Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ) grant.

Acting in concert with transportation providers and employers, the Greater Mercer Transportation Management Association (TMA) offers a broad range of transportation services. Established in 1984 as a non-profit public private partnership, the Greater Mercer TMA works with business and government to develop and implement strategies to reduce congestion such as:

- ***Ride share matching program*** using a computerized system to pair interested employees with others who share similar commutes;
- ***Guaranteed ride home program*** that assures a free ride home to participating employees in the event of an emergency under the TMA's *Home Free* program;
- ***Van pool formation*** through the TMA's *VAN BUCK\$* program that offers groups of employees with financial and technical assistance to establish and maintain van pools; and
- ***Personalized trip planning*** for transit users.

As a neutral third party with strong links to both employers and transit providers, the Greater Mercer TMA has established a strong presence in the region. The TMA is well positioned to expand this role by undertaking new activities to facilitate new reverse commute initiatives.



Trenton Reverse Commute Route and Fares Analysis

DVRPC examined ten sample commutes between Central Trenton and suburban employers to assess the fit between transit network and suburban job centers. General destinations were based on DVRPC's *1990 Employment Centers Study* and street maps were used to pinpoint specific places of work. Route, fare and estimated trip times were provided by NJ Transit and SEPTA. Map 4 and Table 6 report the results of DVRPC's analysis of ten reverse commute routes. For a trip originating from Central Trenton, seven of the ten destinations are accessible using NJ Transit and SEPTA bus routes. All seven of these commutes are "single seat" rides that do not require a transfer.⁴ The average one-way fare for the eight routes is \$1.31 with an averaged estimated trip time of 37 minutes.⁵

⁴ This exercise assumes that rides originate from Central Trenton. Workers who are not within walking distance of Trenton bus stops may also travel by car, bus or other forms of transit.

⁵ Trip time measures bus travel time only. Door-to-door travel typically exceeds trip time.

**Map 3
BUS AND RAIL SERVICE
IN THE GREATER TRENTON REGION**

Legend	
	Rail Service
	Bus Service

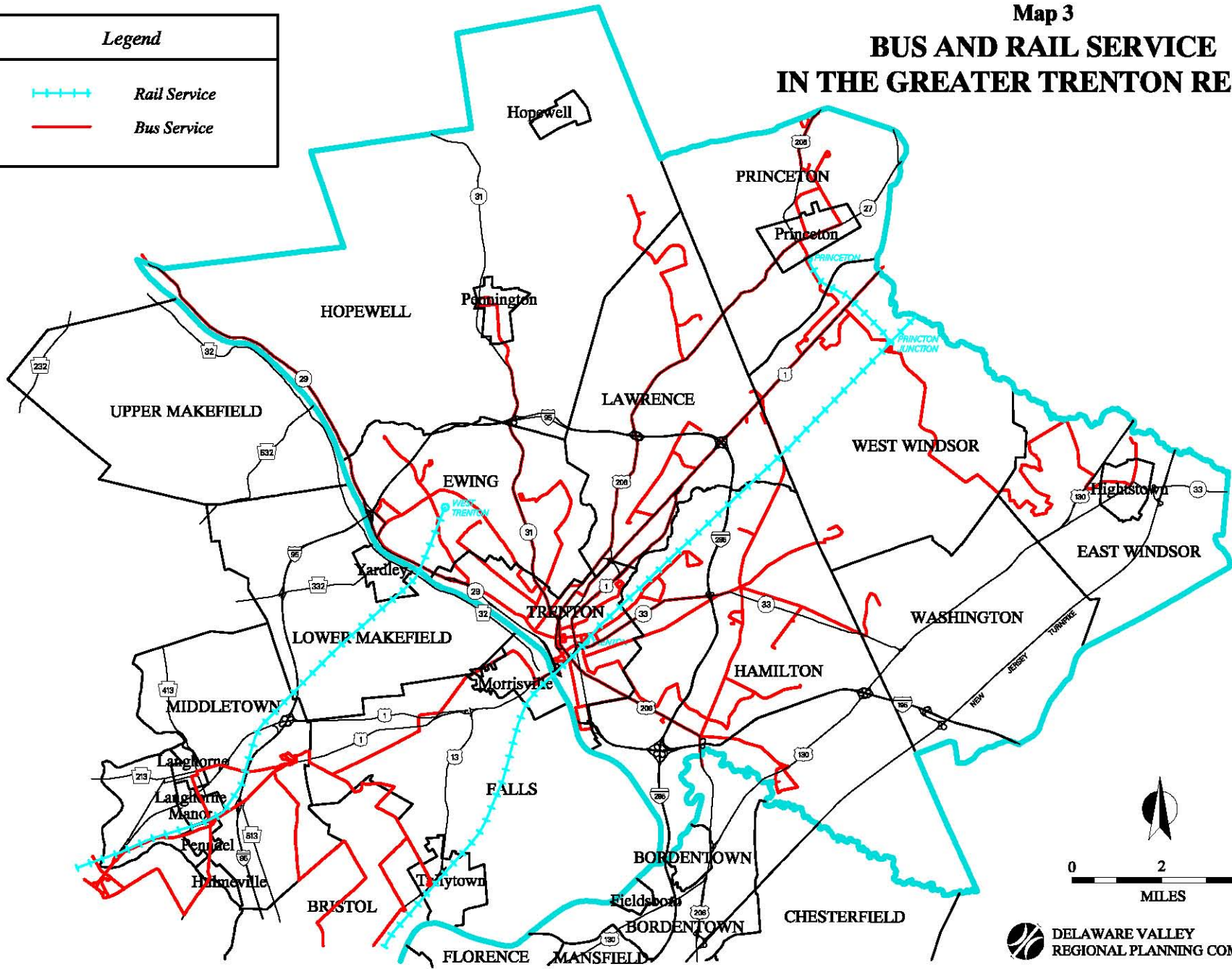


Table 6
Trenton Reverse Commute: Sample Routes and Fares

No.	Destination (location)	Bus Route (from Central Trenton)	Fare (1 way)	Trip time (1 way)
1	Mercer Mall (Route 533 north of Route 1)	603	\$1.40	50 min.
2	Carnegie Center (Route 1 & Carnegie Road)	600	\$1.00	32 min.
3	Rider College (Route 206 inside I-295)	606	\$1.00	33 min.
4	Mercer County Airport-Ewing (I-95 at Scotch Road)	607	\$1.00	25 min.
5	Interchange 7 Business Park (Route 130 & Rising Sun Road)	Not served by NJ Transit	--	--
6	Windsor Center (Routes 571 & 533 in Cranbury)	Not served by NJ Transit	--	--
7	Princeton Medical Center (Witherspoon Road in Princeton)	605	\$1.00	26 min.
8	South Gold Industrial Park (Routes 130 & 526 & 33)	Not served by NJ Transit	--	--
9	Oxford Valley Mall (Route 1, Langhorne, PA)	127 (SEPTA)	\$2.40	40 min.
10	Mercer County Community College (Route 533 & Old Trenton Road)	609	\$1.40	55 min.

Source: *Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission* for route analysis and *NJ Transit* and *SEPTA* for fare and average trip time data.

In terms of overall employment center accessibility, two of the twelve centers identified by DVRPC on Map 2 and Table 5 cannot be reached from Trenton via the existing transit network. Center 9.8 extends along Route 130 north and south of the I-295 interchange. There is no bus or commuter rail service on Route 130 which means that office buildings and industrial parks along this corridor are not accessible to transit-dependent persons. Center 9.7 is located in Hightstown and East Windsor and includes concentrations of jobs in warehouse and distribution centers. While the Princeton Junction Shuttle transports Hightstown residents to the Princeton Junction Rail Station, there is no link for Trenton workers to reach Hightstown destinations.

While this review of sample routes and fares suggests that many Trenton residents are relatively well connected to the existing transit network, several cautions are in order. Although DVRPC attempted to include a sample of geographically diverse destinations, smaller employers located on less well-traveled streets are under-represented in this analysis. In addition, DVRPC

did not attempt to measure or evaluate frequency of service, but rather focused on determining the extent of the network itself. Finally, this exercise was based on weekday travel during peak hours and does not attempt to differentiate between service availability on first, second and third shifts. This distinction between peak and off-peak service can be particularly important to major employers such as hospitals, hotels and conference facilities that operate multiple shifts.⁶ It also may limit the ability of workers to extend their normal working hours in response to special circumstances.

Consider the case of a Trenton resident with a job on the Route 1 corridor who commutes via NJ Transit's 600 bus to Plainsboro (Trenton-Princeton-F Forrestal Village). On weekdays, buses leave the Trenton Rail Station every half hour beginning at 6 a.m. and running through to 6:30 p.m. The one-way trip takes about 52 minutes. Return service from Plainsboro to Trenton is also available every half hour from approximately 7:15 a.m. to 7:45 p.m. A first shift worker who works regular hours Monday through Friday is well served by this level of service -- unless he or she is asked to stay at the job past 7:45 p.m. Anecdotal evidence encountered during the course of this study has indicated that employers have a preference for workers who are not dependent on transit precisely because their schedules and travel patterns are more adaptable.




Other work shifts are less well served by the current system. While second shift workers (those with a 3:00 to 11:00 p.m. schedule) can take the bus from Trenton to work, no service is available for their return trip. Third shift (11:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.) transit-dependent workers have the opposite problem: they have no way of getting to the job site, although service would be available for the trip home. Weekend workers on all three shifts have difficulty putting in an eight hour day with this service availability. The weekend schedule for the 600 bus offers hourly (as opposed to 30 minute) service that operates from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. from Trenton and from 10:00 a.m. 6:00 p.m. from Plainsboro.

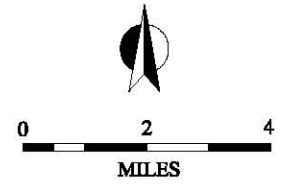
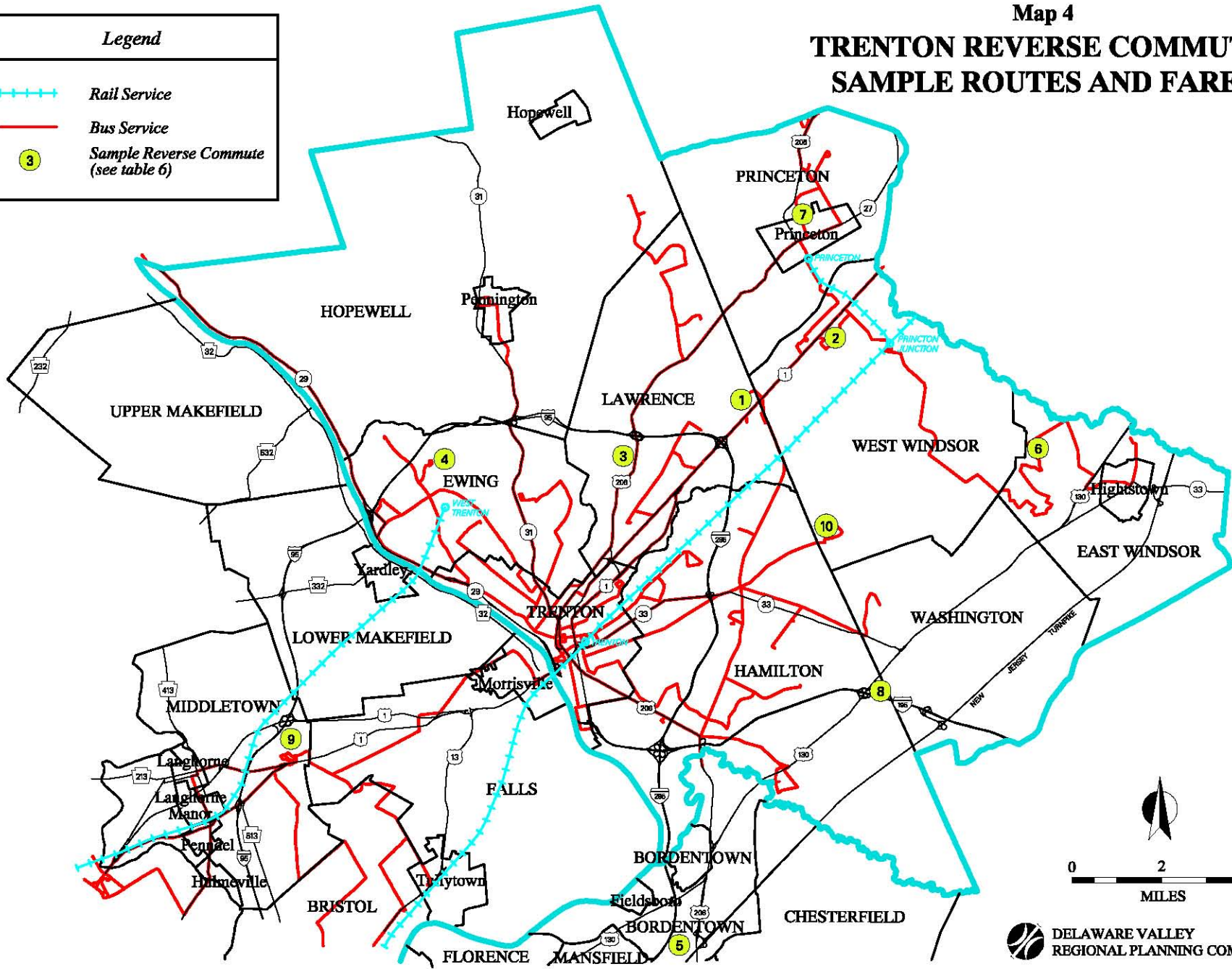
Driven by fare box economics, off-peak service is almost always more limited than peak-hour service. While transit providers must deal with very real cost and revenue considerations, the level of service provided has equally real consequences for transit-dependent workers, particularly individuals who work weekends and outside of daylight hours. In general, these individuals face greater obstacles to utilizing transit as a way of commuting to work. Reverse commute strategies must either try to expand service (which will necessarily entail overcoming significant cost constraints) or develop other means of travel.

Comparing the different levels of service available to first, second and third shift workers demonstrates that the Trenton workforce is not a monolith. Different segments of the population have different needs that must be identified and accommodated. Another critical distinction concerns the opportunity and reward structures facing high and low income workers.

⁶ A number of employers and job trainers interviewed over the course of this study identified transit availability during off-peak hours as a major problem for transit-dependent workers. In response to a request for feedback from the business community, one employer in the health services sector wrote to identify the lack of bus service for second shift and Sunday day shift workers as a critical area of concern to his workforce.

Map 4 TRENTON REVERSE COMMUTE: SAMPLE ROUTES AND FARES

Legend	
	Rail Service
	Bus Service
	Sample Reverse Commute (see table 6)



Experience has shown that minimum wage workers are generally less willing and able to commute long distances than more affluent segments of the population. This reflects the fact that there is a higher monetary payoff for a worker earning \$15 or \$20 an hour to invest additional time and money in a 60 minute commute than there is for a worker earning \$5 to \$7 an hour. In addition to the pay differential, low income parents with young children may also have difficulty finding additional day care to cover the longer hours away from the home. In some cases, it may cost a household more to pay for extended day care associated with a 60 or 90 minute one-way commute than can be justified by a marginal increase in take home pay. While these barriers are not universal, they will reduce the ability of less affluent households, particularly those with small children, from undertaking long and costly commutes.

This review of the public transportation system suggests that while there are ways to improve the current system, (i.e., improve service on existing routes during non-peak hours and consider new ways to serve employment centers currently outside of the system), much of the overall infrastructure is already in place to support a reverse commuting strategy for Trenton residents. The next step in the process is to consider the needs and priorities of area employers.

IV. EMPLOYERS' SURVEY

DVRPC sent surveys to more than 400 large employers (defined as employers with over 100 workers each) in Mercer, Bucks, Middlesex, Somerset, and Burlington Counties. The survey addressed a range of labor market and transportation issues including existing and expected job vacancies, employer willingness to sponsor transportation activities to encourage alternatives to driving alone, and the perceived mismatch between job requirements and job applicants. A copy of the survey accompanied by a letter from City of Trenton Mayor Douglas Palmer summarizing its major findings are included as Appendix I.

Fifty surveys were returned (a 12 percent response rate) from employers representing 28,000 employees. It is noteworthy that the region's major employers -- including Princeton University, Bristol Myers Squibb Company, NJ Manufacturers Insurance Company, Helene Fuld Medical Center, American Standard, Dow Jones Company, McGraw Hill, David Sarnoff Research Center, PSE&G and Rider University -- were represented in the sample.

Findings: No Labor Shortage and Relatively Few Transportation Barriers

The fundamental conclusion of the survey is that, with some notable exceptions, area employers are not currently experiencing a significant labor shortage. As a result, there is relatively little expressed demand for transportation strategies that would improve their access to the Trenton labor pool. More specifically:

- **The survey did not reveal substantial unmet demand for labor.** Two-thirds of respondents indicated that they either had no vacancies or had no difficulty filling positions as they became available. Moreover, vacancies tended to be clustered in the more highly skilled job categories such as managers, professionals and technicians, although the survey also documented limited unmet demand for office/clerical and service workers.
- **Transportation is not a barrier to hiring qualified employees.** Nearly three-fourths of all employers responded that over 80 percent of their employees drive to work alone, while only 3 percent of the workforce take transit to work. The heavy reliance on single passenger automobiles is not perceived as a problem because employees and applicants, by and large, have access to private cars.
- **Employers identify priority transit improvements.** For work sites that are linked by public transportation to Trenton, the most requested changes were for more frequent service (37%), earlier morning hours (34%), later evening hours (32%), lower fares (32%) and route modifications to shorten trips (32%).
- **Employers rank transportation activities that they might sponsor.** These include variable work schedules (42% currently sponsor & 46% would consider sponsoring) and reserved parking for van/carpools (30% currently sponsor & 46% would consider sponsoring). On the other hand, relatively few companies would consider new

sponsorship of shuttle service to transit stations (6%), subsidizing van/carpools (8%), subsidizing employees public transportation fares (6%) or paying for new or expanded transit service (0%).

- **Attitudes improvement needed over technical skills.** The top three skills reported as lacking in job applicants were responsible attitude and behavior (26%), basic work ethic (20%) and analytic and problem solving skills (20%). These general qualities were cited more frequently than deficiencies in basic English, math and reading (14% each), technical skills (10%) or computer skills (6%).

These findings are somewhat surprising in light of recent employment data. At 5.2 percent in October 1996, the unemployment rate in Mercer County is relatively low by historical standards and has been trending lower over the last few months. A low unemployment rate typically means that there are proportionately fewer members of the labor force actively looking for jobs and signals a tight labor market. While it seems reasonable to believe that under these conditions suburban employers would try to develop new sources of labor (e.g., expressing more willingness to try to improve access to the Trenton work force), the results of the survey do not support this hypothesis. Overall, regional employers are not experiencing significant labor shortages and are not identifying investment in reverse commute strategies as a high priority.

V. INTERVIEWS WITH EMPLOYMENT PROFESSIONALS

In addition to completing the employers' survey, DVRPC conducted a series of interviews with state and local job trainers, placement specialists, managers of temporary agencies and other employment professionals concerning transportation and labor market issues (see listing, Appendix II). The opinions expressed by these individuals generally represent the interests and experiences of their clients, i.e., Trenton residents looking for a job. To that end, the employers' survey and the interviews with employment professionals represent the differing perspectives of people sitting on opposite sides of the desk during a job interview. The employers' survey offers the view of the people who do the interviewing and the hiring. The views expressed by job trainers and employment counselors serve as a proxy for the experiences of the job applicant. A comparison of these two perspectives shows that the interviewer and the interviewee are not currently sharing the same point of view regarding the state of the labor market.

A Difficult Labor Market

While employers were generally satisfied with their ability to hire qualified workers from the regional labor force, employment professionals described a very difficult economic climate for Trenton workers. Competition for jobs is fierce with, as one official estimated, "probably an average of five qualified applicants for each job opening." In addition to the sheer volume of competition, job trainers and placement agents generally agreed that there is a significant mismatch between the basic knowledge and work experience Trenton residents possess and the skill requirements of most new job openings. Although skills can be acquired, given time and resources, many new entrants to the Trenton work force find themselves further disadvantaged by lack of on-the-job experience. This problem is compounded by the fact that due to the tight labor market, "downsized" and other dislocated workers are now pursuing job options that they previously would not have considered.

The rise of temporary services agencies has also had an impact on prospects for full time employment. Employers are increasingly relying on private agencies to fill open positions. The use of temporary employees, even long-term temporary employees, gives employers maximum flexibility to test out new workers while reducing benefits expenses. The growth of temporary services agencies has created both opportunities and challenges for Trenton workers. On the one hand, these agencies have created new avenues to employment for qualified Trenton workers. On the other, securing a full-time job with benefits has become a more difficult task in an environment characterized by heavy reliance on temporary workers.

These factors -- intense competition, skills deficiencies, lack of experience, competition with downsized workers and the rise of temporary services agencies -- have all made the labor market more difficult, particularly for low and unskilled job seekers. The impact of welfare restructuring on public assistance recipients and the regional labor force is another factor that will grow in importance over the next few years. The "Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996" eliminated the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) federal entitlement program and replaced it with a block grant to the states called Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). An important feature of the new federal framework is the notion that recipients must participate in work activities in order to be eligible for benefits.

Because states are charged with designing and administering welfare programs, the federal government will enforce the work requirements on states that fail to meet the work participation targets through a system of substantial fines. States, in turn, will impose rules on welfare recipients that require them to work to retain their eligibility status. For FY1997, the federal requirement is that 25 percent of all participants must be working 20 hours per week, a schedule that accelerates to 50 percent of all participants working 30 hours a week by FY2002. If the state fails to meet these benchmarks, it will be penalized five percent of its total TANF block grant, which, in effect, amounts to a multi-million dollar fine.

While New Jersey and other states are still finalizing their programs, it is clear that thousands of welfare recipients will be entering the labor force as a direct result of the new law. While this is a primary objective of the new policy and should be applauded, it will have unintended consequences as well. First, large numbers of these new entrants lack the job skills and work experience demanded by employers and many -- if not most -- are without cars. This population will be hardest to place in an economy characterized by job decentralization and rising skill requirements. In addition, this relatively sudden influx of people who are required to work in order to retain medical, food stamps and other benefits will put tremendous pressure on the working poor. Many persons who currently have jobs but remain below the poverty line inevitably will be displaced by other individuals participating in the labor force as part of their new work requirement. The prospect of intense competition for low-end jobs has created a new imperative to improve mobility and access to work opportunities outside of the City of Trenton.

Transportation Barriers to Placement

While few employers cited transportation as a serious problem, interviewees were unanimous in their view that Trenton residents face significant transportation barriers as they attempt to enter the labor market. Employment professionals repeatedly expressed three concerns about transit availability.

- **Service doesn't run far enough.** While a detailed market analysis is beyond the scope of this study, multiple interviewees singled out the growing distribution center district in the Cranbury-Hightstown-Jamesburg area as a prime, albeit under-served destination.
- **Service is not frequent enough.** A number of employment professionals argued that infrequent service was a barrier to job placement and retention. When pressed to specify an area that would benefit from more frequent service, Route 1 was selected as the consensus corridor.
- **Service doesn't cover all shifts.** While morning peak hour service was generally viewed as adequate to most markets, employers, temp agencies and placement professionals argued that evening, night and weekend coverage was insufficient. Several individuals cited examples of workers who were unable to keep jobs because while they could arrive to work on-time, they could not guarantee that they could return home at the end of the work day by public transit.

Reconciling the Survey and the Interviews

The employers' survey and interviews with employment professionals present two different views of the state of the regional labor market and the importance of transportation issues. On the one hand, the survey suggests that the hiring needs of major employers are, on the whole, being met. Because employers are able to attract and retain qualified workers under the present system, they see little reason to invest in major new transportation initiatives. By the same token, suburban employers have little incentive to make a special effort to tap into the Trenton labor force.

The interviews, on the other hand, indicate that new entrants to the labor force face stiff competition, particularly for low or unskilled positions. Tight market conditions are compounded by the effects of downsizing and the trend toward the use of temporary workers. In addition, numerous training and placement professionals testified that Trenton residents who do not have access to private automobiles frequently face significant transportation barriers to job placement and retention.

This synthesis suggests that investment in reverse commute strategies, while not employers' highest priority, can pay substantial dividends to Trenton workers and new entrants to the labor force (including former AFDC recipients) by making suburban job centers more accessible. Trenton's job base continues to shrink and the largest and fastest growing new employment centers are generally located beyond the city limits. While all members of the labor force must adjust to the changing geography of the job market, this adjustment is typically much more difficult for workers who do not have a private automobile at their disposal. In 1990, over 9,100 of Trenton's nearly 31,000 households were car-less, and an additional 12,100 had access to a single vehicle in an economy characterized by two-wage earner households. The twin forces of job decentralization and limited auto ownership underlie the case for enhanced efforts to enhance the ability of Trenton residents to commute to jobs in expanding suburban employment centers. The final two sections of this report outline a series of recommendations and strategies that have emerged from this reverse commute analysis and address funding issues.

VI. STRATEGIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While the following set of reverse commute strategies and recommendations share a common goal of making jobs in suburban employment centers more accessible to workers who reside in the City of Trenton, the specifics of the approaches vary widely. These ideas emerged over the course of the year-long study process and represent the combined input of employers, city and state transportation and employment professionals, and other individuals knowledgeable about reverse commute issues. DVRPC attempted to develop a strategy based on workable, affordable alternatives that could be implemented by the City of Trenton or the State of New Jersey in the near term without requiring action by the legislature or significant new funding streams. Nine distinct strategies can be pursued individually or in combination.

1. Create a Roundtable for Transportation and Job Placement Professionals

Job placement professionals know where new jobs are located, but don't necessarily know which transit routes best serve remote job sites. Alternatively, transit specialists know how to get the most out of an intermodal transit system, but have no special expertise to identify emerging job centers. There are obvious benefits to be gained from bringing transportation specialists and job placement professionals together. A knowledgeable third party should host a forum or roundtable for these two groups of professionals to discuss reverse commute issues.

The primary goal of this kind of roundtable would be to educate job developers and placement personnel about how to make the best use of the existing transit system. Although many employment professionals are already knowledgeable about the system, there is strong reason to believe that the vast majority of persons in the field could benefit from some additional education about the transportation network. Face-to-face exchanges would allow NJ Transit and other officials to field questions about specific routes and timetables that may make the difference between a successful and improbable job placement for Trenton residents.

This process would also produce a dialogue that would be useful to NJ Transit and other transportation professionals. With input from job developers, transit providers will be able to better assess the need for proposed route modifications and other service improvements. Additionally, the professional relationships that would develop between members of the transportation and job placement communities would help make future exchanges and negotiations more productive. In short, while initially conceived of as a means of tutoring job placement counselors about the nuts and bolts of the transportation network, the roundtables would produce two-way communication that would benefit the transit community as well.

The Greater Mercer TMA is a strong candidate to convene this process. The TMA is a knowledgeable and well-connected third party that has considerable experience addressing the needs of riders, providers and employers. The TMA currently holds educational "Transit Days" for employers, and should expand this effort by organizing one or more events in Trenton at sites easily accessible to low income persons. In addition, the New Jersey Job Developers Network, a professional organization for persons engaged in locating job openings and making job placements, is an obvious partner for a roundtable or other exchange with transportation professionals. Roundtables should be kept small enough so that they bear more resemblance to an

open discussion than a formal lecture. In addition to covering NJ Transit offerings, the convener is encouraged to present information on SEPTA and other third-party van providers. This recommendation does not require legislation or new funding sources and the first forum could be organized in a matter of weeks.

2. Improve Interjurisdictional Coordination

While journey-to-work data shows that most workers who live in Trenton are employed in New Jersey, Bucks County remains an important employment destination. About 3 percent of the Trenton workforce held Bucks County jobs in 1990 with significant concentrations identified along Route 1 Business and New Falls Road. Route 1 Business is the second largest employment center in the region and New Falls Road, while much smaller, recorded the fastest rate of growth between 1980 and 1990. Both of these job centers could play a more significant role for the Trenton workforce over the next few years. However, although some public assistance programs subsidize client work-related transportation expenses, administrative rules and regulations limit the effectiveness of these initiatives by making it difficult for Trenton residents to commute to jobs in Pennsylvania. More specifically, while General Assistance recipients in New Jersey are eligible to receive three-zone bus passes from the state, these passes are not transferable to the SEPTA system. This practice effectively limits recipients' employment options to destinations in New Jersey.

There is no obvious public policy purpose served by this administrative rule. Improved interjurisdictional coordination between NJ Transit, SEPTA and other transportation providers such as paratransit or van services would be in the best interests of the Trenton population. Although this recommendation does not require new legislation or supplemental funding, it does require a change in practice. Proponents within the city and state labor, welfare and/or other human services agencies will need to come together and make the case for revising this policy. One approach would be to document specific job opportunities in Bucks County, Philadelphia and other parts of the SEPTA service area and to solicit employer letters of support from employers expressing a willingness to hire Trenton workers once transportation barriers are resolved. New federal requirements that stipulate that New Jersey must place one-quarter of its welfare population in work activities or face substantial financial penalties may make welfare officials more receptive to broadening their approach to include both NJ Transit and non-NJ Transit providers.

3. Expand the Use of TransitChecks

Transportation vouchers are a low cost, effective way for employers to promote alternatives to driving alone to work. DVRPC's TransitChek program is one example of an existing voucher instrument that could be used as part of a reverse commute strategy for Trenton residents. Developed in partnership with area public transit agencies and van pool operators, DVRPC's TransitChek is currently used by nearly 200 employers in the Delaware Valley region. Employers award vouchers to their employees on a monthly or quarterly basis in denominations of \$15, \$30 and \$60 (or any combination thereof). Both employers and employees receive tax advantages from using TransitChecks. Under US IRS Tax Code 132(f), transportation vouchers are treated as a non-taxable employee benefit up to a limit of \$720 per person per year. In

addition, the amount an employer spends on TransitCheks is exempt from FICA, Workers Compensation/Disability Insurance, pension, payroll or unemployment taxes. TransitCheks are accepted by all major public transit operators serving the Trenton region, including NJ Transit, SEPTA, PATCO and Amtrak. Participating van pool operators include Vanpool of New Jersey and VPSI Commuter Vanpools.

TransitCheks are an employer-driven program in that employers purchase vouchers from DVRPC and distribute them to their employees. As a result, expanding the use of vouchers in Trenton will require greater outreach to area employers that employ significant numbers of transit-dependent Trenton workers. The Greater Mercer TMA has strong employer contacts on transportation issues and could become a leader on the issue. In addition, numerous other public and private non-profit organizations are actively engaged in job development and placement activities and have developed strong employer contacts in the process. These agencies should also act on behalf of their clients by lobbying their networks of employers to promote the use of TransitCheks. This action could be accomplished as part of an educational exchange between transportation and employment professionals described in the first recommendation in this section. To assist with this process, DVRPC could organize a roundtable on the TransitChek program and provide information about how job developers and other interested parties might approach area employers regarding enrolling in the TransitChek program.

The next three recommendations concern reverse commuting using privately-operated vans. Because vans are smaller than conventional buses, they have a lower ridership threshold to become self-sufficient and have more flexibility to experiment and modify routes in response to changing conditions. Operating costs including liability insurance coverage, however, can present significant obstacles, particularly for routes designed to serve lower-income populations that cannot fully-internalize the cost of service. Because no single approach is right under all circumstances, the next three recommendations consider three different arrangements: employer-operated, employee-operated, and TMA-operated van service.

4. Promote Employer-Operated Van Service

DVRPC's survey of employers revealed only limited demand for sponsoring new shuttle service to transit stations (6% of employers said they would consider adding this service), subsidizing van/carpools (8%), subsidizing employees' public transportation fares (6%) or paying for new or expanded transit service (0%). However, while the aggregate level of support is relatively low, individual survey responses indicate that specific employers are experiencing a significant need for private transit-based initiatives to improve the accessibility of their workplace. In other words, while most firms are satisfied with existing arrangements, a limited number of employers are good candidates for operating or subsidizing van service for their employees.

DVRPC uncovered a small number of private employers that currently provide reverse commute van services for their Trenton employees. These include:

- *Harrison Conference Services* (the conference service provider under contract to Merrill Lynch, Scudders Mill Road and Route 1);
- *Crestview North*, (extended care facilities operator, Langhorne, PA in Bucks County);

- *Great Adventure* (amusement park operator, Exit 7, New Jersey Turnpike; a seasonal employer); and
- *United Parcel Service* (package handling facility, Willow Grove, Montgomery County, PA; a seasonal employer).

Harrison Conference Services offers an interesting case study in light of the fact that they have been providing van service to their Trenton workers for the better part of a decade. Harrison Conference Services is under contract to run the Merrill Lynch Conference Center. Managers at the facility determined that the primary reasons employees were being disciplined were transportation-related. Employees were calling out sick because they couldn't get to work, or, more likely, because although they could get to work, they couldn't get home again at the end of their shift. To remedy this situation, Harrison Conference Services started an afternoon, evening and weekend van connector service for their Trenton employees in 1988 that has proven to be a major success. Personnel management believes that the van service is directly responsible for reduced absenteeism and improved retention, a claim that is supported by the fact that some employees have been taking the van for six years.

The service runs a loop route from the facility on Scudders Mill Road, traveling along Route 1 south to the Perry Street exit to Martin Luther King Boulevard in Trenton. The van makes five scheduled runs a day, beginning at 4:30 p.m. with the last loop leaving at 11:00 p.m. The primary users are housekeepers, food service workers and conference service workers earning seven to nine dollars an hour. The van service also provides a fall back for other employees who find themselves temporarily without the use of their private automobile.

To minimize safety and liability concerns, van drivers are required to become CDL-licensed. In addition to the regular driver (who is paid as an hourly worker), two full-time maintenance workers received their license and function as back-up drivers. Harrison Conference Services treats the Trenton van as an employee benefit and does not ask for contributions from its employees. Total estimated cost for van leasing, operations and maintenance, van driver wages and insurance is approximately \$30,000 a year.

Although there are several major employers along Route 1 with work force profiles similar to that of Harrison Conference Services, DVRPC was unable to identify any others that currently provide van service to Trenton. Uncertainty over the cost of service provision and liability concerns related to use of the vans emerged through interviews and other research as the major obstacles. While these issues are real, private employers can take a number of steps to make them more manageable:

- **Farebox revenue.** Harrison Conference Services treats their van service as an employee benefit and does not charge a per person fare for the service. An alternative model is to charge a nominal fee to help defray the cost of operating the service. For example, if the fare is set at \$1 a day, a core of 20 riders would generate \$100 per week or \$5,000 in a 50-week work year. While priced below break-even, this nominal fare represents a significant contribution towards defraying gas and normal maintenance expenses. Employers should keep in mind that low wage workers are less able to make significant contributions at the farebox and should not undercut their service by pricing too high.

- **Partner with other companies.** Another way of spreading fixed costs over a larger base while simultaneously boosting ridership is for two or more employers to develop a van service as a joint venture. For example, while no single company in an office park or shopping center may be able to create a van service on its own, shuttle or connector service to Trenton might prove to be a viable option for a group of employers located in close proximity. The Train Link shuttle between Princeton Junction train station and the Princeton Forrestal Center for Forrestal Center employees is an example of this approach.
- **Targeting service provision to periods of peak demand.** A year-round program that attempts to transport three shifts of workers door-to-door with a service area covering all of Mercer County is obviously a much more expensive proposition than a seasonal evening shuttle from a single work site to a Central Trenton drop off point. Just as firms can control the cost of the goods and services they produce by making good business decisions, they can also control the costs of employer-operated van service by limiting the transportation services they offer to match the greatest needs of their workforce.
- **Shared use of vehicle.** Another cost-sharing strategy is to divide the use of the van over more than one business function. For example, vans used to transport second and third shift workers can be put to use making light deliveries or transporting employees on work-related trips during the remainder of the day. While the different uses of the van must be compatible, creatively dividing use of the vehicle over multiple business functions can be an effective cost-management strategy.

Farebox revenues, partnering with other employers, limiting service to peak demands, and dividing the use of the vehicle represent four different approaches that employers can use -- singly or in combination -- to minimize the cost of providing van service. In addition to looking at the expense side of the equation, employers should consider the potential cost savings to be gained from investing in transportation solutions for their work force such as reduced absenteeism, fewer discipline problems and reduced employee turnover. While these cost savings are more difficult to quantify with precision, substantial salary and benefits dollars are at stake.

Liability concerns were also identified as a deterrent to employer-operated van service. According to *Ridesharing and Insurance*, a report issued by the New Jersey Insurance Commissioner in 1994, "When a corporation leases a Van for one year or more, or purchases a Van, coverage is normally endorsed on a large master fleet policy. Van passengers injured in accidents are compensated generally through Workers Compensation which serves to curtail catastrophic lawsuits." To this extent, liability coverage is a normal cost of doing business. Employers can further their insurance expense by maintaining a favorable claims record and taking other safety precautions (e.g., CDL-licensed drivers) as proscribed by their insurance companies.

Recognizing that the state has a legitimate interest in encouraging employer-sponsored ridesharing programs, the New Jersey state legislature attempted to limit employer exposure to lawsuits related to their involvement in such activities. The *New Jersey Ride Sharing Act of 1981* provides that:

An employer shall not be liable for injuries or damages sustained by passengers and other persons resulting from the operation or use of a motor vehicle not owned, leased or contracted for by the employer, when his or her employee is in a ridesharing arrangement between his or her place of residence and place of employment or termini near such places (emphasis added).

According to the language of this statute, protection does not extend to employer-operated van services. Expanding this coverage to include vehicles used for ridesharing arrangements that are owned, leased or contracted for by employers would substantially reduce their exposure to lawsuits and, accordingly, lower the cost of liability insurance. This amendment, however, would require an act of the legislature.

5. Expand Employee-Operated Van Service

The Greater Mercer TMA's VAN BUCK\$ program offers groups of employees financial and technical assistance to form new van pools. Under the current rules and guidelines, at least 75 percent of the van's passengers, including the driver/coordinator, must be employed with a Greater Mercer TMA-member company. The driver/coordinator is responsible for recruiting passengers, distributing information from the TMA to members of the van pool, and maintaining daily log sheets tracking the number of passengers. Several different van options are available to accommodate different size groups. A minimum of five riders are needed for a seven person van pool; six persons are needed for a nine person van pool; and ten persons are needed for a fifteen person van pool.

The TMA helps the driver/coordinator lease the van from an arranged van pool provider who will directly bill the coordinator for the monthly lease fee (minus the Greater Mercer TMA's portion of any applicable subsidy). If the van pool cannot make the minimum passenger requirement, the TMA will pay for any empty seats (based on the lease agreement) for the first three months of operation. This subsidy will be paid directly to the third party provider. The driver/coordinator is responsible for collecting money from riders and making lease payments to the van pool provider. In exchange for these responsibilities, the driver/coordinator has the use of the van during non-work hours.

While the VAN BUCK\$ program provides a solid foundation for an employee-operated van service in the region, there are several ways that the program could be adapted to better serve Trenton workers.

- ***Recruit riders and drivers from Trenton.*** Up to 25 percent of van pool riders can be employed by non-TMA member employers. This means that all Trenton workers are potentially eligible to be part of a van pool. Because of minimum ridership requirements, larger van pools are generally more desirable than smaller van pools. The Greater Mercer TMA can strengthen the VAN BUCK\$ program, improve the viability of individual van pools and help facilitate reverse commute options for Trenton residents by developing a recruitment strategy that targets city residents. The TMA should work with job trainers, placement agents and private sector temporary services agencies to reach large numbers of potential van pool drivers and passengers. This strategy could be implemented as part of

the roundtable described in the first recommendation of this report. The TMA should also establish links with community-based programs such as Trenton's *Weed & Seed* program as part of its Trenton recruitment strategy.

- ***Explore alternative lease structures.*** Under the current program, vans must be leased to a single individual as opposed to a group of persons or legal entity such as a non-profit organization. As a result, the success of the VAN BUCK\$ program largely depends on the TMA's ability to identify and recruit capable driver/coordinators. In some cases, it may be more feasible for two or three individuals to share the responsibilities (and benefits) of being a driver/coordinator. A lease that allowed two or three persons to jointly assume responsibility would be a more flexible tool. The current lease also precludes non-profit 501(c)(3) organizations from participating in the program. Because community-based organizations are designed to serve a concentrated, well-defined residential population, these non-profits are good candidates for operating van services. Trenton-based church groups are another potential van service provider. A more flexible lease structure that allowed for vans to be leased in the name of legally chartered non-profits and/or multiple drivers has the potential to increase the supply of drivers and significantly expand the program in the City of Trenton.

In terms of potential impact on private car insurance rates, the best available evidence suggests ridesharing may generate modest savings for some individuals. The 1994 New Jersey *Ridesharing and Insurance* report concludes that "under most circumstances and for most people, there will be a rate reduction for participating in a car pool. The amount of the reduction will depend on the distance commuted, the coverages elected and the insurance company involved. Under no circumstances, however, will there be a rate increase as a result of participation in a car pool." However, discounts do not apply to "youthful operators" (i.e., single males under 30 and married males and single females under 25), and carpools must have at least three participants.

6. Create TMA-Operated Start-Up Van Service

The Greater Mercer TMA has established itself as a successful facilitator able to help businesses, government and transportation providers work cooperatively on the region's transportation problems. Many of the TMA's programs have already been discussed in this report as they relate to the objective of encouraging reverse commuting from Trenton. While these programs promote employee-operated van pools, ridesharing and other important reverse commute initiatives, the organization's expertise regarding the region's travel patterns and employer's transportation needs could also be put to use to launch a limited number of TMA-operated van pools. These routes could be treated as start-up operations with the intent to spin them off to private individuals or employers once ridership has been established. In this way, the TMA would be free to explore and develop other new promising routes and service areas.

It should be stressed that launching new van service -- even on a temporary or targeted basis -- will require new sources of start-up and operating funds for the Greater Mercer TMA. Possible funding sources include government (federal, state, county and/or local), foundations and the business community. While the results of the employers' survey suggest only limited interest from the private sector, it may prove easier to generate corporate support for a demonstration

project run by a qualified non-profit organization than to persuade firms to operate new transportation services themselves.

Interviews with employment professionals and DVRPC's analysis of the fit between employment centers and the existing transportation network both point to Cranbury-Hightstown as a high growth area that is relatively inaccessible to transit-dependent Trenton residents. Because this area is within an hour's ride of Central Trenton, has been identified as a high priority by public and private sector job placement agents and is home to large number of relatively low skill, above minimum-wage jobs, it may be an appealing candidate for testing the concept of a TMA-operated van service.⁷

7. Modify Ridesharing and Guaranteed Ride Home Programs

Nearly one in five workers living in Trenton commuted to work using a car or van pool in 1990. However, the prevailing trend is away from ridesharing in favor of driving alone to work, an unfortunate development in light of the fact that ridesharing can improve mobility for persons with limited access to automobiles without requiring major new investment in transportation infrastructure. By using existing programs to promote ridesharing and by creating new institutional arrangements targeted specifically at low income Trenton workers, it is possible to create a climate more favorable for car and van pools.

The Greater Mercer TMA uses a state-wide computerized system called POOL MATCH to match interested persons with compatible commutes in order to develop car and van pooling arrangements. The TMA provides names and work phone numbers to promising ridesharing partners who, in turn, are responsible for following up with other potential riders and establishing car or van pools. Mail, phone and internet options are available to register in the POOL MATCH database. POOL MATCH is open to persons regardless of their place of employment (i.e., TMA and non-TMA member firms alike), and there is no fee charged for the matching service.

In order to encourage workers to consider ridesharing alternatives, the Greater Mercer TMA offers a guaranteed ride home program called Home Free. This program provides eligible participants up to two free taxi rides home a year in the event of an emergency or unplanned change in work schedule. To be eligible, participants must be employed by a member of the Greater Mercer TMA or a participating state agency and must have either taken a car or van pool, biked, walked or used public transit at least once a week and on the day that the ride is needed. Participants must also be registered in the TMA's Rideshare database.

Guaranteed ride home programs such as Home Free function as inexpensive insurance policies purchased by employers that encourage alternatives to commuting alone by reducing the risk that an employee will be stranded without a ride. This concept is adaptable to different

⁷ NJ Transit studied the Hightstown-Cranbury area in 1995 and concluded that there was not sufficient ridership to warrant a new bus route from Trenton or any other location. The viability of other types of service using vans or other small vehicles, however, was not explored in this analysis.

circumstances and has been successfully implemented in many different jurisdictions. For example, the Denver Regional Council of Governments offers a *RideArrangers* program to participating employers in an eight-county region that guarantees a taxi ride home of up to 100 miles one-way without capping the number of rides an employee can take in a given year.

While the Greater Mercer TMA's POOL MATCH and Home Free programs offer a good starting point to promote car and van pooling, there are several steps that can be taken by the TMA and others to better adapt them to the needs of Trenton workers:

- **The TMA should market the POOL MATCH ridesharing program to Trenton's community-based organizations and job placement network.** The Greater Mercer TMA's mission is to "work together with the business community and government to develop and implement strategies that reduce congestion and make it easier for (member establishments) to do business." While the TMA was designed to work with employers, its underlying goals and objectives are broad enough to allow it to work with job trainers, placement agents and community based organizations. Effective marketing of the POOL MATCH program to Trenton workers through these intermediaries will not only help solve the region's transportation problems but will also bring new clients to the TMA. This objective could be partially achieved as part of an educational roundtable for transportation and employment professionals as proposed earlier in this section.
- **Broaden eligibility for the *Home Free* program.** Under existing guidelines, participants must be employed by a member of the Greater Mercer TMA to be eligible for the guaranteed ride home program. While this make sense as a way to serve employers, an employer-driven model is not the best way to serve Trenton residents, many of whom may not currently be in the workforce. Because *Home Free* is structured like a group insurance program that protects against the need for an emergency ride home, the key to broadening the program is to find other kinds of central agents willing and able to insure other groups. This might include private sector placement entities (such as temporary services agencies), public sector human service providers, or non-profit community based organizations and job developers. By adapting the guaranteed ride home program from an employer-based to community-based model, many more Trenton residents could be served.

8. Facilitate the Process for NJ Transit Route Modifications

NJ Transit operates 178 bus routes covering 78.1 million annual route miles using 1,900 buses. Despite this extensive network, NJ Transit must constantly change in response to new economic development patterns. DVRPC uncovered several accounts of success stories involving bus route modifications to serve new employment destinations. A recent example involves a new Educational Testing Service (ETS) facility in Ewing Township in a developing office park. While several NJ Transit bus routes came close, none actually served the site. ETS approached the Greater Mercer TMA about seeking a bus route modification. The TMA responded by convening other area employers and temporary services agencies together with officials at NJ Transit. In a short period of time, NJ Transit agreed to modify route 602 (from Trenton to Pennington) to service this location. This service will begin April, 1997.

Observers reported that this success story can be attributed to a more receptive attitude at NJ Transit. The transit agency, in turn, may have been encouraged by the fact that the agency was approached by a coalition of employers and other interested parties coordinated by an effective lead agency. NJ Transit officials, for their part, stressed the need for parties who are seeking the route change to document their request with data and other evidence of potential ridership.

Because minor route modifications can be implemented in a reasonable time period and usually do not involve significant expense or legislation, steps should be taken to facilitate this process. The TMA's success in the ETS case suggests that it should continue to play the facilitator's role and use its knowledge of the process and relationships with key parties to good advantage. At the same time, NJ Transit should be encouraged to de-mystify the process by outlining the steps and burdens of proof that parties seeking route modifications should meet and this information should be disseminated by the agency and the TMA. NJ Transit has received well-deserved compliments on its willingness and commitment to be responsive to employers needs. In order to facilitate change, employers and employment placement professionals must provide sufficient documentation and analysis in order for NJ Transit to justify changes to its service, schedule or routes.

9. Use Welfare Restructuring as an Opportunity

The "Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996" constitutes a major overhaul of a vast and complex public assistance system. State block grants replace numerous categorical programs and states have gained relief from a variety of federal mandates in the process. Work requirements contained in new federal legislation are designed to bring substantial numbers of former welfare recipients into the workforce in a very short period of time. By next year, states must involve at least 25 percent of their welfare recipients in work activities for at least 20 hours a week. By the year 2000, this participation rate must rise to 40 percent of all recipients, and the individual work requirement expands from 20 to 30 hours per week. By 2002, fully half of the public assistance population must be participating in work requirement for a minimum of 30 hours per week. States stand to incur harsh penalties for failing to achieve their work requirements, including fines on the magnitude of five percent of their total welfare block grant which amounts to a multi-million dollar assessment.

While the exact numbers for Trenton are still being calculated, welfare restructuring will have a major impact on the city and its residents. About one in seven Trenton households reported receiving public assistance in the 1990 Census. Work requirements will also intensify competition for jobs currently held by the working poor to the extent that jobs now going to welfare recipients are jobs that would have otherwise gone to persons at or just above the poverty line. The end result will be a more difficult job market for a large segment of the labor force.

There is overwhelming evidence that there are insufficient numbers of jobs in Trenton to absorb these new entrants to the labor force, particularly since many job seekers will lack the skills and work experience demanded by employers. Many skilled and unskilled individuals alike will be hampered by lack of access to automobiles needed to commute to remote job sites not well served by public transit. While this set of events presents a challenge, it also presents an opportunity to

create new transportation and job links between low income persons in Trenton and suburban job centers. Under the "Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act," welfare recipients have new incentives to enter the labor force or lose cash assistance, food stamps and/or medical benefits. At the same time, the specter of substantial federal fines linked to the work requirement timetable creates a new and persuasive reason for the state to invest in transportation for the urban poor.

Reverse commute strategies that are linked to welfare restructuring should attempt to work in concert with existing organizations and programs that serve public assistance populations. The Weed & Seed program, for example, is an inter-agency effort launched in 1991 to reduce violent crime, curb drug use, and promote community revitalization. The program, which is funded through a combination of federal (US Department of Justice) and city dollars, features Safe Havens that function as resource centers in four high crime neighborhoods. Safe Havens are open from 3:00 to 10:00 p.m. and offer programming for all ages. In addition to their existing educational, cultural and recreational functions, Weed & Seed Safe Havens could easily serve as drop-off points for car or van pools headed to suburban job centers. These centers are well known within the community, already function as places of refuge, and are geographically located to be accessible to their targeted communities.

The Weed & Seed program currently owns or has access to four vans. While these existing vans are heavily used during the Safe Havens' regular operating hours, it is conceivable that they could support third shift reverse commute activity. Alternatively, additional vehicles could be leased or purchased by the city or state as a part of New Jersey's effort to achieve its work participation targets. Because van riders will probably not be able to cover the full costs of transportation out of their wages, it is unlikely that vans will be able to operate on a break even basis. Employers and/or public sector sources would be required to subsidize capital or lease costs for new vehicles.

The recommendations outlined in this report describe a variety of approaches that can be pursued singly or in combination as part of a welfare-to-work strategy. Because the state must adopt its new plan by July 1, 1997, however, the next few months are critical. Elected officials and other policy makers in Trenton should take advantage of this window of opportunity and act quickly to try to incorporate transportation provisions into the state's new welfare program.

VII. FUNDING

The funding scenario for major new transportation initiatives is cloudy at best. The prospects for federal dollars rest largely on the fate of ISTEA re-authorization, expected to be resolved in FY1997. Even assuming that reauthorization provides states and regions with a reasonable degree of funding flexibility, the overall level of appropriations will still determine to a large extent which new projects are within budget. On the state and local level, transportation funders must balance demand for new services with the need to maintain the existing transportation network. It is fortuitous that, with Trenton as its hub, the existing transportation network is capable of supporting a number of different reverse commute initiatives without major new capital spending. In terms of private sector funding prospects, the results of the employers' survey indicate very limited interest in committing new funds to expensive new reverse commute programs. Many employers, on the other hand, demonstrated a willingness to consider lower cost alternatives such as variable work schedules and reserved parking for van/car pools.

While traditional transportation funders remain important, reverse commute proponents should also look to non-traditional sources for capital and operating funds by defining their projects in non-transportation-oriented terms. For example, reverse commute initiatives can be billed as strategies to improve access to jobs and create economic opportunity as opposed to efforts to shift mode splits and reduce mean travel time. For public assistance populations, projects that link low income persons to suburban job centers can be marketed as supporting the transition from welfare-to-work. In addition to addressing pressing needs of a large segment of Trenton's population, this approach can help the state meet federally-imposed work requirements. Failure to keep to the timetable will cost New Jersey millions of dollars in TANF block grant funds.

Reverse commute initiatives are already being supported by a range of funders. *Bridges to Work* is a four-year, \$20 million national reverse commute demonstration project developed by Public/Private Ventures, a non-profit research organization headquartered in Philadelphia. Under *Bridges to Work*, programs created by regional collaboratives in five cities are being funded to link inner-city residents to suburban jobs. While the organizational details differ from site to site, the basic model for these projects includes three elements:

- Placement in existing, private sector suburban jobs through a metropolitan placement network;
- "Reverse commuting" transportation (including mid-shift transportation home in an emergency provided by public or private trains, buses or vans); and
- Support services such as child care, counseling and crisis intervention.

The research and planning phase of the demonstration are being funded by a consortium of major foundations including The Ford Foundation, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Annie E. Casey Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts. The US Department of Housing (HUD) and the US Department of Transportation also provided funds for research design and development. The actual implementation of the demonstration project itself is being supported by \$11 million in funds, including \$8 million from HUD and \$3 million from local sources.

Last fall, HUD proposed expanding the *Bridges to Work* initiative to cities nationwide in FY1998 as part of the Administration's larger effort to implement welfare reform. This initiative would include \$75 million to help 75 to 100 additional metropolitan areas develop reverse commute strategies, with a preference for communities designated as Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities. President Clinton's FY1998 budget request (released February 6, 1996) included a new \$100 million welfare-to-work program to be funded under the transit program that would offer welfare recipients access to jobs, training and support services. While the fate of these proposals is uncertain, they demonstrate that reverse commute projects can attract funding from non-transportation sources and that they are being viewed by many policy makers as an integral part of the welfare-to-work infrastructure.

Other funding opportunities may be created at the state level. As of February 1997, the New Jersey Assembly and Senate were both considering enabling legislation that would allow the State to enter into transportation-oriented public-private partnerships. Bills A2560 and S1746 would authorize the Commissioner of Transportation to select up to seven transportation projects to be developed as public-private partnership demonstrations over a five year time period. More specifically, these bills would authorize the Department of Transportation and the New Jersey Transportation Corporation to "solicit proposals from private or public entities or consortia thereof to plan, design, construct, equip, operate, finance, improve and maintain demonstration projects."⁸ The bills also authorize the state to enter into indemnification agreements which may provide a vehicle to limit liability concerns expressed by private sector partners.

According to state officials, large and small initiatives -- including reverse commute projects -- would be eligible for consideration under this program. One key criteria for project selection would be the degree to which private sector participation improves the viability of the venture. While no votes were scheduled in either house as of February 1997, transportation officials have expressed cautious optimism about the bill's prospects for passage. If New Jersey embraces this approach, they would be following a precedent set in other states including Pennsylvania and Delaware.

Even with the prospects of a broader funding base, there are no current sources of money earmarked for Trenton reverse commute initiatives. As a result, this study focused on identifying workable, affordable alternatives that can be implemented by the City of Trenton and/or the State of New Jersey in the near term without requiring new legislation or significant funding streams. With few exceptions, the recommendations and strategies that came out of this analysis do not have significant financial or legal barriers to implementation. Funding and implementation issues for each of the recommendations outlined in the previous section are summarized in Table 7.

A number of the recommendations call for action by the Greater Mercer TMA. The TMA has earned a reputation as a respected facilitator and transportation problem solver for government and the business community. These same skills can be used to expand the range of opportunities for Trenton resident workers through a variety of TMA-led reverse commute initiatives. While some of these projects require little outside funding (e.g., creating a roundtable

⁸Statement from the Assembly Transportation and Communications Committee on A2560.

for transportation and job placement professionals), others cannot be launched absent new funding sources for the TMA (e.g., creating a TMA-operated van service or expanding the guaranteed ride home program). The Greater Mercer TMA should not be expected to implement costly recommendations without additional support from government and the business community. Transportation and non-transportation funding sources should be reviewed with an eye toward providing the TMA with the required start-up and/or operating support to undertake this expanded agenda.

Table 7
Summary of Funding and Implementation Issues

Recommendation	Issue Summary
Create a Roundtable for Transportation and Job Placement Professionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ No significant funding or implementation issues
Improve Interjurisdictional Coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ No new funding required ▶ State-level policy change needed to adopt a transit pass that can be used on both NJT and non-NJT systems
Expand the Use of TransitCheks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ No new public funding required ▶ Outreach to employers needed to expand program
Promote Employer-Operated Van Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Employer contribution required (farebox revenue, partnerships can help reduce dollar outlays) ▶ Legislative action needed on liability issue
Expand Employee-Operated Van Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ TMA subsidy helps with start-up costs ▶ Improved recruitment lowers break-even point ▶ Explore alternative leases (for groups, non-profits)
Create a TMA-Operated Van Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Start-up funding required ▶ Spin successful routes off to private parties
Modify Ridesharing and Guaranteed Ride Home Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ No new funding required ▶ Program change needed to create non-employer-based option for Home Free program
Facilitate the Process for New Jersey Transit Route Modifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ No significant funding or implementation issues
Use Welfare Restructuring as an Opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ New funding required for most ventures ▶ Pursue non-transportation sources of funds

Appendix I GREATER TRENTON AREA EMPLOYER NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Your name _____ Title _____
 Company _____
 Company Address _____
 Telephone Number _____
 Location (if different from above) _____

1a. What are the major products or services provided by your company at this location?

1b. 4-digit SIC Code # _____

2. Total number of employees at this location:
 a. Full-time employees with benefits _____
 b. Full-time employees without benefits _____
 c. Part-time employees with benefits _____
 e. Part-time employees without benefits _____

3. Anticipated full-time employees 3 years from now _____

4. Describe your company's work schedule (Check all that apply).
 ___ a. Fixed Schedule (standard work hours from ___ a.m. to ___ p.m.)
 ___ b. Staggered Shift (staggered starting and quitting times between ___ a.m. to ___ p.m.)
 ___ c. Flextime (flexible starting and quitting times centered around core hours.)
 ___ d. Compressed Week (work day(s) lengthened to shorten work week.)
 ___ e. Multiple Shifts (please list) _____
 ___ f. Other _____

5. Please estimate the percentage of your employees who commute by the following modes:

___ a. Drive Alone	___ d. Public Transportation (bus/rail)
___ b. Car Pool	___ e. Bicycle
___ c. Van Pool	___ f. Walk

6. Which of the following transportation activities does your company **currently** sponsor?
 ___ a. Subsidized van/car pools
 ___ b. Reserve close parking for van/car pools
 ___ c. Adopt variable work schedules
 ___ d. Subsidize employees' public transportation
 ___ e. Provide shuttle to transit stations
 ___ f. Other _____

7. Which transportation activities **would** your company sponsor?

- a. Subsidized van/car pools
- b. Reserve close parking for van/carpools
- c. Adopt variable work schedules
- d. Subsidize employees' public transportation
- e. Provide shuttle to transit stations
- f. Pay for new or expanded transit service

8a. How would you rate public transportation access to your company?

- a. Adequate
- b. Limited
- c. Not Available

8b. If public transportation is limited or not available, has it affected your company's ability to fill job vacancies?

- a. Yes
- b. No

8c. If yes, how many and what types of jobs are affected? _____

9. If your work site is linked by public transit to Trenton, check any of the following changes that you think would help to better serve your company and its employees living in Trenton:

- a. Earlier morning operating hours
- b. Later evening operating hours
- c. More frequent service
- d. Lower fare
- e. A route change to provide a more direct and shorter trip for your employees
- f. Additional bus stops
- g. Passenger shelters
- h. Other suggestions: _____

10. Is it necessary for your employees to own cars to carry out their job responsibilities?

- a. Yes
- b. No

11. Does your company have difficulty filling any of the following positions?

	# of Existing Employees	# of Vacancies	Average Salary
Officials/Managers	_____	_____	_____
Professionals	_____	_____	_____
Technicians/Skilled Workers	_____	_____	_____
Operators (semi-skilled)	_____	_____	_____
Laborers (unskilled)	_____	_____	_____
Sales Workers	_____	_____	_____
Office and Clerical	_____	_____	_____
Service Workers	_____	_____	_____

11a. Reasons for difficulty. _____

12. Which skills does your business require and which skills do job applicants most often lack?

	Required	Lacking
a. Word processing	_____	_____
b. Computer skills	_____	_____
c. Basic math	_____	_____
d. Basic English	_____	_____
e. Basic reading	_____	_____
f. Communications	_____	_____
g. Supervisory and decision making skills	_____	_____
h. Analytical & problem solving skills	_____	_____
i. Responsible attitude and behavior	_____	_____
j. Basic work ethic	_____	_____
k. Technical skills	_____	_____
l. Other (please specify) _____		

13. What percentage of jobs in your company require:

___ a. High School Degree ___ b. College Degree ___ c. Advanced/specialized training

14. Does your company hire and train unskilled job applicants?

___ a. Yes ___ b. No ___ c. Don't know

15. If available, please attach information on (1) your employees' work trip travel times and (2) their home locations broken down by zip code. Either attach a computer print-out or complete the following:

WORK TRIP TRAVEL TIMES		HOME LOCATIONS	
<u>Time</u>	<u>Percent of Employees</u>	<u>Zip Code</u>	<u>No. of Employees</u>
1-15 minutes	_____	_____	_____
16-30 minutes	_____	_____	_____
31-45 minutes	_____	_____	_____
46-60 minutes	_____	_____	_____
More than 1 hour	_____	_____	_____

Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions. All company information will be kept confidential.

If you would like a copy of the final report, check here: _____

Please return this questionnaire to the following address or fax to (215) 592-9125:

Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission
 The Bourse Building, 8th Floor
 111 South Independence Mall East
 Philadelphia, PA 19106-2515

Contact Barry Seymour or Beth Drost at DVRPC with any questions at (215) 592-1800.



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
CITY OF TRENTON, NEW JERSEY 08608

DOUGLAS H. PALMER
MAYOR

609-989-3030

November 8, 1996

Dear Regional Employer:

Earlier this year, you received a letter from me inviting you to participate in a survey about employer needs and transportation issues in the regional labor market. The findings are being used to help respond to employers' needs, thereby facilitating a stronger regional economy. We distributed over 400 questionnaires and received responses from employers representing more than 28,000 workers. The resulting analysis allowed us to draw some important conclusions to help regional employers as well as current and prospective employees. Major findings include:

- The vast majority of workers commute by means of single passenger automobile. Nearly three-quarters of employers responded that over 80 percent of their employees drive alone to work. Only about 3 percent of their workforce take public transportation to work.
- Over half of surveyed employers rated public transportation as "limited" while another 22% described it as "not available." The remaining 22 percent described public transportation as "adequate."
- Twelve percent of employers reported that they had trouble filling jobs because of public transportation.
- For work sites that are linked by public transportation to Trenton, the most requested changes were for more frequent service (37%), earlier morning hours (34%), later evening hours (32%), lower fares (32%) and route modifications to shorten trips (32%).
- The most popular transportation activities that establishments sponsor include variable work schedules (42% currently sponsor and 46% would consider sponsoring) and reserved parking for van/carpools (30% currently sponsor and 46% would consider sponsoring). On the other hand, relatively few companies would consider new sponsorship of shuttle service to transit stations (6%), subsidizing van/carpools (8%), subsidizing employees public transportation fares (6%) or paying for new or expanded transit service (0%).
- The top three skills reported as lacking in job applicants were responsible attitude and behavior (26%), basic work ethic (20%) and analytic and problem solving skills (20%). These general qualities were cited more frequently than basic English, math and reading (14% each), technical skills (10%) or computer skills (6%).
- The survey did not reveal substantial unmet demand for labor. Two-thirds of respondents indicated that they either had no vacancies or had no difficulty filling positions as they became available. Vacancies tended to be clustered in the more highly skilled job categories such as managers, professionals and technicians, although the survey also revealed limited unmet demand for office/clerical and service workers.

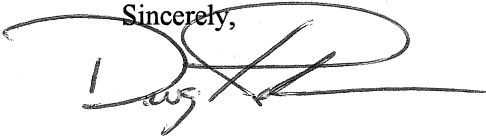
November 8, 1996
Page Two

These findings confirmed some of our expectations and challenged others. Because these results are based on a limited sample, they may differ from your experiences. **We are interested in hearing your comments, feedback, and suggestions for further actions to address regional labor force and transportation issues.** Mail, fax or phone your comments no later than November 27, 1996 to:

Ms. ML Wernecke
Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission
The Bourse Building, 8th Floor
111 S. Independence Mall East
Philadelphia, PA 19106-2515
Phone: (215) 592-1800
Fax: (215) 592-9125

This information will be used by the City of Trenton as we plan our job training and economic development strategy and will be provided to New Jersey Transit to assist with route design and scheduling. All information will remain strictly confidential. Thank you once again for your participation in this important undertaking.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Douglas H. Palmer", written over a large, stylized flourish.

Douglas H. Palmer
Mayor

Enc.

Trenton Employment Study

Opportunity for Additional Comments

Your name:

Business establishment:

Address:

Phone:

Type of business (SIC code, if available):

Size of workforce:

We are interested in hearing your comments, feedback, and suggestions for further actions to address regional labor force and transportation issues. Mail, fax or phone your comments no later than November 27, 1996 to:

Ms. ML Wernecke
Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission
The Bourse Building, 8th Floor
111 S. Independence Mall East
Philadelphia, PA 19106-2515
Phone: (215) 592-1800
Fax: (215) 592-9125

APPENDIX II
List of Interviewed Employment Professionals

Meaghan Cannon
Personnel Manager, Harrison Conference Services

Frank D'Enrico
Mercer County JTPA

Bob Estok
Mercer County Community College

Hank Fein
NJ Department of Labor, Employment Services

John Mizin
NJ Department of Labor, Employment Services

Steve Ponella
Trenton, Division of Economic Opportunity

Claudia Soch
Branch Manager, Western Staff Service

Tom Walls
Mercer County Vocational Technical School

